Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

The **Strategic Information and Research Development Centre (SIRD)** is an independent publishing house founded in January 2000 in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. The SIRD list focuses on Malaysian and Southeast Asian studies, economics, gender studies, social sciences, politics and international relations. Our books address the scholarly communities, students, the NGO and development communities, policymakers, activists and the wider public. SIRD also distributes titles (via its sister organisation, **GB Gerakbudaya Enterprise Sdn Bhd**) published by scholarly and institutional presses, NGOs and other independent publishers. We also organise seminars, forums and group discussions. All these, we believe, are conducive to the development and consolidation of the notions of civil liberty and democracy.

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn

Chinese Tongzhi Catholics' Tales

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
Matthew 5:4

Edited by

Eros Shaw, Mark Larrimore and Michael Clifton

SIRD

Strategic Information and Research Development Centre

Copyright © 2022 Eros Shaw

This edition is published in 2022 by
Strategic Information and Research Development Centre
No. 2 Jalan Bukit 11/2, 46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, Malaysia
Email: gerak@gerakbudaya.com
Website: www.gerakbudaya.com

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia / Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Blessed Are Those Who Mourn : Chinese Tongzhi Catholics' Tales / Edited by
Eros Shaw, Mark Larrimore and Michael Clifton.
ISBN 978-967-2464-48-8
1. Catholic gays–Anecdotes.
2. Christian gays–Anecdotes.
3. Anecdotes.
I. Shaw, Eros. II. Larrimore, Mark.
III. Clifton, Michael.
808.882

Translated by Lucia Translation Studio
Cover design by Andy Yang
Layout by Janice Cheong

Printed by Vinlin Press Sdn Bhd
2 Jalan Meranti Permai 1
Meranti Permai Industrial Park
Batu 15, Jalan Puchong
47100 Puchong, Selangor, Malaysia

Dedicated to

Our Lady of Seven Sorrows
and
The Global Network of Rainbow Catholics

Contents

Preface May Your Lips Kiss Mine – Eros Shaw xiii

Forewords

1. Dom Laurence Freeman xxvii
2. Ruby Almeida xxxi
3. Dr Michael Brinkschröder xxxii
4. Rev Dr Ngeo Boon Lin xxxiv
5. Fr Chan Moon Hung xxxvii
6. Fr James Alison xxxix
7. Francis DeBernardo xli
8. Mgr Keith Barltrop xlvi

I. STORIES

Mainland China

Growing Through Confusion to Clarity 4
Joseph, Beijing

A Small Wish 9
Wen Tao, Fuzhou

Praise the Grace of the Lord 12
John, Shenzhen

How Can There Be a Perfect Solution in This World, One That Fails neither Jesus nor You? 15
Hu Shang Xue, Shanghai

A Gay Catholic Activist Fighting for LGBTQI+ Rights 27
Ling Xuan, Fuzhou

Perplexity on the Way of the Cross 32
Anqing, Chengdu

Let Me Go, Hold Me Tight 39
Lao Yao, Fujian

Lost, and Found the True Light 42
Ai Tai, Henan

Follow the Light 48
Shi Ge, Shanghai

My Homosexual Love 60
Qian Ai, Shanxi

Such Glorious Grace 64
Freeman, Henan

Stand Up, You Good-For-Nothing! 73
Yu Han, Beijing

My Answer: A Gay and Religious Path 78
Br Ting Ming, Shaanxi

Reason Lights the Path of Faith 81
Thomas, Heilongjiang

Differences Everywhere 86
An-an, Zhejiang

Loving People Like You 91
Pablo, Hebei

Lord, It Is Wonderful for Us to Be Here 94
Xiao Lu, Hangzhou

Left and Right: A Straight Man Who Was Once a 'Gay' 98
Jiang Nan, Nanjing

I Am the Ex-wife of a Gay Man, and I Defend Gay Rights 103
Little Teresa, Wuhan

Hong Kong

The 'Commandment' of Love 110
Paul

An Adventure to Love, Happy to Love: Reflection on the Holy Week Liturgies 114
Joan of Arc

A Heavenly Maiden Dispersing Flowers Makes Butterflies Busy 130
Si Mei-lik

Why Must We Divide Male and Female? 135
Yi On

Confession of Double-Identity: Christian and Gay 138
Giovanni Battista

Taiwan

The Seed That Fell Among the Thorns 144
Oprah

You Are My Father, and I Am Your Beloved Son 149
Anthony Cheng

A Lone Pilgrimage 155
André

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me 178
Frank Tsen-Yung Wang

My Child Is a Tongzhi 191
Mrs Kwok

Unconditional Love: Heartfelt Words From a Father 194
Mr Kwok

Macau

Walking in Sorrow With the Lord 198
Serrafina

Overseas

Yearning for Love 208
Francisco, South Korea

My Dream of Evangelisation and Equality 211
Hu Jiahao, Thailand

Youth 217
Yong Hao, Malaysia

It Does Get Better 219
Jo, Malaysia

Love in Pain 223
J, Malaysia

Walking This World as a LGBTQI+ Person 226
GM Tan, Malaysia

From Judge to Soulmate—A Story of Acceptance 231
Sarah, Australia

Little Secret 240
Francis, Australia

Tea for Togetherness 245
Benjamin Oh, Australia

The Word Was the True Light That Enlightens All Men; And He Was Coming Into the World 252
Félix Chen, Canada

II. REFLECTIONS

Gay Catholics in Mainland China: The experience of Eros Shaw and others 260
Eros Shaw

LGBTQI+ Catholics in Hong Kong—If We Speak Out, Will We Be Listened To? 265
Yip Lai Shan

A Reflection on Love Amid Controversies Over Same-Sex Marriage 281
Compassion Hong Kong

The Taiwanese Catholic Church's Attitude Towards Homosexuality 288
Philip

On Consecrated Life 291
Br Xiao Bei

The God of Difference: Towards a Catholic Theology of Homosexuality 296
Cai Qi

How LGBTQI+ Catholic Groups Contribute to the Church 313
Eros Shaw

Eros Shaw's Interview with *Progetto Gionata* 325

Fr Joseph's Interview with a Catholic Media Outlet 336

Coming Out of 'Exile in Babylon' on the Issue of Homosexuality: LGBTQI+ People's Voice to the Synod of Bishops 345
Eros Shaw

III. DIFFERENT PATHS TOGAYTHER: CALLING FOR CHINESE TONGZHI (LGBTQI+) BELIEVERS' TALES 359

IV. BRIEF GUIDE TO LGBTQI+ CATHOLIC FELLOWSHIPS 363

Preface

May Your Lips Kiss Mine

You did anything to bury me, but you forgot that I was a seed.

—**Dinos Christianopoulos**, gay Greek poet

1

May Your Lips Kiss Mine is the title of the Chinese version of the book, which is taken from the first chapter of the Song of Songs. Mystics often like to add a footnote to this song, which describes the love between humankind and God. For LGBTQI+ Catholics, the love for God and the love for others contradict each other in the eyes of the Mother Church. They become bad sons who embarrass their Mother. However, they do not only long for the kiss of God and the kiss of their lovers, they also wish for the kiss of their Mother. But they are regarded by the Church as powerless.

"God is the power of the powerless," then-Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger wrote in *Der Gott Jesu Christi. Betrachtungen über den Dreieinigen Gott*.[1] This is adapted from Jeremiah 23:6, "The LORD is our righteousness (NRSV)." When we express this with St John's famous quote that "God

[1] Joseph Ratzinger, German, later Pope Benedict XVI, is widely regarded as one of the most important Catholic theologians of the second half of the 20th century.

is love" (I John 4:8), it makes love the power of the powerless. It points to the fact that love is everyone's natural right, no matter if we are poor, lowly or weak. For God is the power of the powerless, and the spring of justice.

As Simone Weil says, "Love is a sign of our wretchedness."[2] What she meant is that to love the poor so deeply is to suffer for them and thus become poor (we just need to think of the loneliness and perplexity that Jesus endured before he sacrificed himself for love). When banned from love or from being loved, we may fall into a kind of poverty. For the LGBTQI+ Catholics who love God so dearly, hovering around God, self-loathing and lowliness may be a very real state of their lives. Having their rights deprived in civil society, they should have found a place of comfort in the Church, since Jesus teaches us to love the least among us. But it is the Church that reminds them of the impossibility of getting married and having sex. They strive to love themselves, but the negative words and deeds of others have pushed them to the edge of the abyss, ready to give up. Those looking for relief may have even thought of taking their lives.

'Chinese', 'LGBTQI+', and 'Catholics' are among the hot picks of many search engines worldwide. A combination of two of these—'Chinese LGBTQI+', 'Chinese Catholics' and 'LGBTQI+ Christians'—draws even more attention. Nonetheless, the triplet of 'Chinese LGBTQI+ Catholics' barely draws the focus of the mass media. What meaning does the term really carry?

Sociologists generally put the ratio of LGBTQI+ persons at roughly two precent of the general population (I use this ratio extremely conservatively). According to the *Annuario Pontificio* 2022, there are over 1.36 billion Catholics worldwide.[3] The Holy Spirit Study Centre in Hong Kong counted 10.5 million Chinese Catholics in 2016.[4] From here, we

---

[2] Simone Weil (1909-1943) was a French-Jewish philosopher and mystic. She is most commonly associated with *La Pesanteur et la grace* (Gravity and Grace).

[3] See 'Vatican: Number of Catholics worldwide rose by 16 million in 2020,' *Catholic News Agency*, February 11, 2022. https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/250362/number-of-catholics-in-asia-and-africa-continues-to-rise

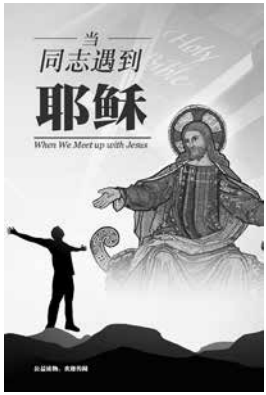
[4] Anthony Lam Sui-ky, 'The decline of China's Catholic population and its impact on the Church,' *AsiaNews*, August 13, 2016. https://www.asianews.it/news-en/

can deduce that there are about 27.2 million LGBTQI+ Catholics across the world, with 200,000 of them living in China (what a startling figure!)

Two hundred thousand Chinese LGBTQI+ Catholics are situated at the abyss of relational poverty, struggling on their own to live their lives. I have met no more than 300, and I wonder how the rest of the 200,000 live. Do they lock themselves in the closet, or opt to marry someone of the opposite sex, worrying day and night that their hidden identity will be discovered? Do some of them struggle to respond to God's call to lead a religious life? Or do they stay away from the Church, living their spiritual lives unsupported?

The Christian faith seems to have become in extreme contradiction with LGBTQI+ issues. This is not just true in the West, but has also intensified in Africa, Latin America, Asia and China. This has to do with the increase in the number of Christians and the changing attitude towards religion. In the case of China, the merging of the Christian faith and traditional values has doubled the burden of LGBTQI+ Catholics.

I had the chance to edit a booklet titled *When We (LGBTQI+) Meet Up With Jesus*.[5] I received a great deal of feedback and testimonies. Some were encouraged by the lines contained therein and bravely faced their identity. Some changed their attitudes towards the Church. Others came to learn that a few 'anti-gay' Biblical quotes do not actually correspond with contemporary understandings of LGBTQI+ identities. And then there were some who could read the message of Christian unity. This booklet collected stories of many LGBTQI+ Christians who were mostly Protestant fellows. Do we need to do something for the 200,000 Chinese Catholics with an LGBTQI+ background?



It is now a time for reflection, a time for dialogue.

The-decline-of-China%E2%80%99s-Catholic-population-and-its-impact-on-the-Church-38373.html

5 Electronic download available at https://zh.usa1lib.org/book/21843184/111b35

2

The theme of this book is 'dialogue' and 'mercy'. The Catholic Church today radiates its charm by promoting 'dialogue' in international affairs. Should not the Church also then be obliged to engage in dialogue with her flock of LGBTQI+ members? This book contains several stories of LGBTQI+ Catholics, aiming to provide a chance for dialogue, to allow for greater reflection. There are different voices and stances here, be they conservative or open, defensive or obedient, contradictory or non-ambiguous, so as to present this reality.

In the Bull of Induction of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, Pope Francis provides a very insightful explanation of mercy.

> The Church is commissioned to announce the mercy of God, the beating heart of the Gospel, which in its own way must penetrate the heart and mind of every person. The Spouse of Christ must pattern her behaviour after the Son of God who went out to everyone without exception. (#12, *Misericordiae Vultus*)

> Let us open our eyes and see the misery of the world, the wounds of our brothers and sisters who are denied their dignity, and let us recognize that we are compelled to heed their cry for help! May we reach out to them and support them so they can feel the warmth of our presence, our friendship, and our fraternity! May their cry become our own, and together may we break down the barriers of indifference that too often reign supreme and mask our hypocrisy and egoism! (#15)

Listening is needed for 'dialogue' and 'mercy'. LGBTQI+ Catholics want to be heard, beyond just their tears and sorrows. In the note calling for stories, I wrote:

> I always think about whether the stories of LGBTQI+ Catholics should be recorded. It is true that all kinds of grace streamed out from Jesus could be regarded as witnesses. Yet, I do not wish to have the stories recorded merely as 'witnesses'. From the deep friendships between others and me, I see also the profound spiritual experiences among LGBTQI+ Catholics. It is through the balancing of their faith and the homosexual identity, as well as genuine spiritual exercises, they arrive at self-acceptance and gratefulness to God. They have such different personalities and have received grace so abundantly. I am taking the

> initiative to edit such a work that focuses on the Chinese community. Starting with the two identities of being gay and being Catholic, and supported by the ability to reach deep reflection, I endeavor to approach this goal.

The spiritual experiences mentioned in these stories are parts of all the valuable spiritual experiences of the Holy Church. Their experiences represent all souls who strive to look for God in their darkness.

3

This book includes stories from gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgenders, LGBTQI+ Catholics from the Greater China area of the mainland, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and other parts of the world, as well as from parents of homosexuals and the ex-wives of gay men. What we are missing are the stories of gay clerics. This, of course, does not mean that they do not exist. We indeed know a few. It is just that when we invited gay priests and nuns to tell their stories, they all refused, bar none. Their timidity was not only spiritual, but also worldly. This absence carries profound meaning, sending a message that is perhaps stronger than the presence of such a story (I decided to leave a page blank to represent this).

Similarly, many authors use their Christian names or nicknames as members of the LGBTQI+ community often do. The patron saints should be the role models we learn from, but now their names protect our identities. Why are we not brave enough to show our real selves? Who does not wish to disclose their real identity? Even when the Church opens her doors to welcome them, how many of them will take part with their identities exposed? They have no problem joining secretly as individuals, but this leads to a lack of belonging. The option of disclosing or hiding illustrates their frustrations, fear and distrust. The wounds in their hearts hinder them from opening themselves to society and to the Church. If a reason needs to be named, it is the deep-rooted attitude of society and the Church that is bringing them harm. This is a real and practical issue.

There are stories in this book that talk about being hurt by the Mother Church, but then being able to find consolation from God. “I

have been like a portent to many, but you are my strong refuge" (Psalm 71:7). Some bishops, priests and nuns say, "We lack guidance. We don't know how to deal with this." But to help our brothers and sisters find consolation in the kiss of the Mother, "an openness of heart and of spirit that needs no law awaits no guideline."[6] Although we know clearly that there is guilt and fear deep in their hearts, "when our brothers and sisters who, because of broken relations, broken families and broken lives, stand timidly at the doors of our churches—and of our lives—unsure whether they are welcome or not, let us go out to meet them."[7]

I once studied in the Philippines. There was a night we invited young people to come to the Church. A transgender person passed through the Church door. I saw this tiny and thin guy, and extended my invitation to him to pray in the Church. He sneered and left. Ironic, self-pitying, and impotent, his sneer was one that I could never forget (how many people have left the Church in a similar manner?) He probably thought that he would be rejected, and so rejected others first. I wish that the text I just quoted would be faithfully implemented in the Philippines and in the Universal Church for transgender people, gays and all those with broken lives.

If we say that this book aims to secure a right, it is not merely a right to appeal. It is also a desire to be listened to, a desire to be understood and a desire for a truly effective pastoral programme. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (*CCC*) states that clearly.[8] I would say, however, that the vast majority of people do not act in this manner. This book hopes to awaken the affection of listening, and to proclaim release to the captives and the year of the LORD's favour (Isaiah 61:1-2). This book is in line with what Pope Francis said in his proclamation of the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.

---

6 Pastoral letter issued by Archbishop Socrates Villegas of Lingayen-Dagupan, president of Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines on April 9, 2016 as a response to Pope Francis' *Amoris Laetitia*. See http://www.archivioradiovaticana.va/storico/2016/04/12/mercy_should_not_wait_for_guidelines,_filipino_bishops_say_/en-1222135

7 *Ibid.*

8 "They must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity. Every sign of unjust discrimination in their regard should be avoided" (#2358, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

4

In Chinese, the LGBTQI+ community has a very appropriate name, '同志 *tongzhi*' (in this book, *tongzhi* and LGBTQI+ are entirely interchangeable, except for the unique prefix, which refers to the entire sexual minority). First of all, 同 *tong* can be interpreted as 'the same'. In the context of LGBTQI+, 同 *tong* can express two parties of the same gender. 志 *zhi* can be used as aspiration and will. The word *tongzhi* can mean that two people of the same gender have the same soul. Isn't this the most beautiful expression of human love? Second, the word *tongzhi* is also fittingly politically correct. In a communist context, a *tongzhi* is a comrade fighting side by side against injustice. *Tongzhi* also represents like-minded people who share the same worldview, outlook on life, and values. As左丘明 Zuo Qiuming (556-451 BC) states, "同心则同志 [*be of one heart and one mind*]."

For the Chinese word order, we were very aware of the terminology used from the very beginning—specifically, whether we should use 'LGBTQI+ Catholics' or 'Catholic LGBTQI+'. Given that one's sexual orientation cannot change, and one's religious affiliation can, we concluded that the invariable should be stressed as the first component of the compound noun, and picked 'LGBTQI+ Catholics'. In English at present, 'LGBTQI+ Catholics' refers to Catholics who are LGBTQI+, whose faith is fundamental to their existence, like everyone else. As such, I have kept the same word order. Nonetheless, this group of LGBTQI+ who have an unchangeable sexual orientation continue to show their steadfast piety to the Catholic faith. They have a deep love for the traditions, the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and our Lady. They respect the Pope, their bishops, priests and nuns. They love to pray the Rosary and go to confession. They regularly attend Mass, and some of them have a special devotion to attending Tridentine Mass.

I once heard a friend quote a fellow Christian, who is gifted with a special charisma, saying that there is a powerful dark force behind homosexuals. Is it these LGBTQI+ Catholics, who are pious enough to resist the oppression from their Church, who are being backed up by this dark force? What kind of charisma could this be?

In any case, we need to listen to the science. On March 23, 2016,

the World Psychiatric Association called for all medical institutions to end 'conversion therapy' for homosexuals, and to push forward the legalisation of same-sex marriages worldwide. The declaration states:

> The WPA considers same-sex attraction, orientation, and behaviour as normal variants of human sexuality. It recognises the multi-factorial causation of human sexuality, orientation, behaviour, and lifestyle. It acknowledges the lack of scientific efficacy of treatments that attempt to change sexual orientation and highlights the harm and adverse effects of such 'therapies'. Psychiatrists have a social responsibility to advocate for a reduction in social inequalities for all individuals, including inequalities related to gender identity and sexual orientation. Equality in a society helps sexual minority reduce their pain, and eventually improve their mental health.[9]

There are many who do not accept this, but many others who do. Yet, they keep asking "What about chastity?" "Would their sexual behavior be a problem?" But what is chastity? It sometimes refers to the practice of being chaste, and other times it refers to a virtue. A virtue can be understood as a 'practice of good deeds', that which puts a person at ease and willing to do good like it is second nature. Thomas Aquinas (ca. 1225-1274) believed that chastity was not so much the dismissal of emotions and desires, but bringing these under the influence of human reasoning.[10]

Discussion on marriage equality and sexual behaviours for homosexuals, therefore, is not impossible under the Canon Law of the Church. There have been, in fact, plenty of discussions among theologians and ethicists. Regrettably, we have to realise that the gap between academics and the general public also exists within the Church. This gap does not necessarily stop us from listening to the voices from the other side. When adopting Bible verses and using different theoretical frameworks fail to make us convince one another, we hope

---

[9] Dinesh Bhugra, Kristen Eckstrand, Petros Levounis, Anindya Kar, and Kenneth R Javate, 'WPA Position Statement on Gender Identity and Same-Sex Orientation, Attraction and Behaviours,' *World Psychiatry* 15:3 (2016): 299–300.

[10] Fu Jen Theological Publications Association, *Theological Dictionary: A One-Volume Encyclopedia of Christian 'Catholic Theology,'* Kuangchi Cultural Group (2012): 574.

that stories will at least allow for some reflection.

When the Jews conspired to persecute the apostles, Gamaliel, the teacher of the Laws, remained open to the Holy Spirit. "If this enterprise, this movement of theirs, is of human origin it will break up of its own accord. But if it does in fact come from God you will be unable to destroy them. Take care not to find yourselves fighting against God" (Acts 5:38-39). The verse ends with "his advice was accepted."

5

For a huge organisation comprising 1.36 billion members, any sloppiness can potentially cause great harm. There have been many stories of division in the Anglican, Lutheran and Presbyterian Churches, as well as others. Bishops in Africa continue to support the criminalisation of homosexuality. But even when considering the appalling evil that occurred in Ghana,[11] we continue to respect their status as bishops. Yet, we would unreservedly use all means to say no to their words and deeds, and the results these may lead to (this is what Paul did for Peter, see Galatians 2). Undoubtedly, these words and deeds lack compassion. They are contrary to the Holy Spirit and are not true to the Gospel (Galatians 2:14).

Because we are also the people of God, we will to live within the Catholic Church with a spirit of discernment and prayer, and with hope that God will one day give us a final answer through His Church. "This is what the Lord has done for me when he looked favorably on me and took away the disgrace I have endured among my people" (Luke 1:25). The advancement of human rights is a victory for God that will one day be shared by the Church generally and as a whole. This requires that we listen to God with the spirit of obedience. 'We' includes every one of us in the Church, be it the Pope, lay members, our fellow LGBTQI+ Catholics and those African bishops who support the legalisation of homosexuality. We are obedient and grateful for the words of Pope Francis, that the Church should be "the house of the Father, where there is a place for everyone, with all their problems" (#310, *Amoris Laetitia*).

---

[11] Global Network of Rainbow Catholics. 'The Church must stand with the weak and the persecuted in Ghana,' *Rainbow Catholics*, October 31, 2021. https://rainbowcatholics.org/we-stand-with-the-persecuted-in-ghana/

In May 2021, Pope Francis launched the two-year global Church consultation process, which will lead to the 2023 synod on synodality. Just like the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy, this process will be an excellent opportunity to "encounter, listen, and discern,"[12] and help the Church reflect deeply on the image of the Church as the people of God. On February 24 this year, as a student at the Institute of Pastoral Studies at Loyola University Chicago, I participated in the 'Building Bridges North-South: A Synodal Encounter Between Pope Francis and University Students' event face-to-face with the Pope on Zoom. He is a good shepherd and the best example of "encounter, listen and discern." As part of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics, all of our brethren and sisters deeply feel the urgency. We look forward to the universal Church listening to stories of LGBTQI+ believers and hope that the official dialogue process between the relevant Holy See institutions and our network can be established as soon as possible. This will be a shared blessing for the Church and LGBTQI+ Catholics.

At present, all LGBTQI+ work in the Catholic Church has a primary target. That is, phrases like 'intrinsically disordered', 'objectively disordered', and 'homosexual person called to chastity'. Evil expressions like this should be thrown into the dustbin of history forever. Many contributors in this book have been hurt by these words that completely oppose the spirit of Jesus, as have many LGBTQI+ Catholics worldwide. Such words also permanently block LGBTQI+ people interested in Jesus from the Church. Therefore, I now call on all parties to work together to completely remove such evil expressions from any Church statements. This is the first step in reconciliation.

Let us always pray for the Church, for the LGBTQI+ Catholics, for the world and for mercy.

---

[12] 'Pope Francis launches 2-year synodal path with call to 'encounter, listen, and discern', *Catholic News Agency*, October 10, 2021. https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/249241/2023-synod-on-synodality-pope-francis-launches-2-year-synodal-path-with-call-to-encounter-listen-and-discern

6

As for LGBTQI+ issues, the world is changing day by day, not only in the Western world, but also in Asia and China. In the past couple of years, one of the most important LGBTQI+ issues in the Catholic Church has been the publication of a book entitled *Building a Bridge: How the Catholic Church and the LGBT Community Can Enter into a Relationship of Respect, Compassion, and Sensitivity* (2017)[13] by Jesuit Fr James Martin. His book is recommended by several cardinals, archbishops, and bishops. Fr Martin also states in an article[14] that the current minor changes in the Church's stance on gay issues is mainly due to two reasons: first, Pope Francis; second, grassroots members re-examining the relationship between the Church and LGBTQI+ members as more and more are willing to come out. I look forward to more dialogue and compassion in the Chinese Catholic Church with our book, in response to Fr Martin's book in the English-speaking world.

The Chinese version of this book was completed in the Jubilee of Mercy, and six years later, the English version will be available to readers. Of course, for understandable reasons, some content in the Chinese version, such as literary and artistic creations and some theoretical articles, have not been translated. The title has also been changed to *Blessed Are Those Who Mourn*. Besides the relief of being able to complete such an impossible and uncertain book, I would also like to thank the many relatives, friends, and benefactors who offered their support, help, and prayers.

I would like to express my gratitude to my friends, especially the brothers and sisters who contributed their stories. In order to promote

---

[13] 'Building a bridge' is very reminiscent of the original meaning of the Roman pontiff (pontifex, 'bridge-builder'). The co-founders of New Ways Ministry, Fr Robert Nugent and Sr Jeannine Gramick, published a book titled *Building Bridges: Gay and Lesbian Reality and the Catholic Church* (1992). 'Respect, compassion, and sensitivity' is from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* #2358 (1992). However, given the current negative attitude towards homosexuals in the Church, the catechism's statement is not taken seriously.

[14] Fr James Martin, 'How parishes can welcome LGBT Catholics,' *America Magazine*, August 23, 2018. https://www.americamagazine.org/faith/2018/08/23/father-james-martin-how-parishes-can-welcome-lgbt-catholics

understanding in the Church and in society, they overcame obstacles and fearlessly shared their life stories. This is never easy.

I would say thank you to Teresa Lai-Shan Yip from Hong Kong, Prof Frank Wang Tsen-Yung from Taiwan and Benjamin Oh from Australia. They have given me a lot of practical help and have put forward many valuable suggestions, without which this book would not be so profound.

Rev Dr Ngeo Boon Lin recommended and coordinated the publication of this book, for which I am very grateful. A special thanks also to Andy Yang, Cui Zien and Damien Lu for their friendly support, as well as to Lucia Cheung and translation team.

This book would not have been possible without the prayers and support of the following friends. Sincere thanks to Sriram Sundareswaran, Fabio Lucas Maximo dos Santos, Couple Agape, Sau Chu Alison Yeung, Ruby Almeida, Michael Brinkschröder, Christopher Vella, Fernando Gonzalez Bustos, Paul Teece, Michael Pettinger, Mac Hu, Tom Ryan, Martin Pendergast, Julian Filochowski, Homosexuelle und Kirche, Katholischer Queergottesdienst Munich. Thank you also to Mary Mcaleese, who asked a mutual friend to convey her blessings to us and this book.

I give thanks for the grace of God. "The grace which was given to me has not been wasted. Indeed, I have worked harder than all the others—not I, but the grace of God which is with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10). I thank God for letting us finish this book. The verse we just quoted from the First Book of Corinthians indeed starts with "what I am now, I am through the grace of God" (15:10). May this verse become a motto to everyone. And may my fellow LGBTQI+ Catholics always remember this and be thankful to God.

The completion of such an English book was something I did not dare to imagine when I started my LGBTQI+ Christians ministry 13 years ago, in 2009, but with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the publication of this book marks the end of one stage of our work. In the next, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, I look forward to there being more of you, all those with humility and compassion: LGBTQI+ Catholics, straight people, priests, nuns, bishops, religious orders, parish lay leaders, consecrated people, permanent deacons, missionaries, etc. In the family of the Catholic Church, pray and work diligently for our LGBTQI+ friends to be treated

without discrimination in sacramental life.

The most common experience my fellow LGBTQI+ friends share is separation, isolation and a lack of any sense of inclusion. This happens in society, in the Church, and somehow at home as well. In the light of faith, "no one is a stranger, no one is excluded, no one is far away,"[15] the sufferings of LGBTQI+ Catholics (and LGBTQI+ communities alike) would go towards the joy of the resurrection, of communion and of love, by the transformation of the Way of the Cross and that of Our Lady of Seven Sorrows.

Lastly, I would like to borrow Pope Francis' words that he said to those attending the Synod of Bishops. This could also be understood as his wish for every one of us, LGBTQI+ or not alike, to make space "for the action of the Holy Spirit only if we…put on apostolic courage, evangelical humility and trusting prayer."[16]

Sacred Heart of Jesus, have mercy on us! Our lady of Seven Sorrows, pray for us!

Eros Shaw

Shanghai, May 24, 2022

Feast of Our Lady of Sheshan, Help of Christians

---

[15] 'Pope Paul VI's Vatican II closing address,' *Brave Catholic*, n.d. http://www.bravecatholic.com/pope-paul-vis-vatican-ii-closing-address/

[16] 'For pope, the Synod is not a parliament with its negotiations and compromises,' *AsiaNews*, May 10, 2015. https://www.asianews.it/news-en/For-pope,-the-Synod-is-not-a-parliament-with-its-negotiations-and-compromises-35493.ht

Foreword 1

Jesus assumes that we will find it easy to love those to whom we are instinctively attracted. There is no great reward in doing that, he assumes. But loving them is the first class in the school of love that will teach us how to love those we find difficult, those who do us harm and those we tend to demonise. Loving those whom we feel it pleasant and natural to love feels different from learning how to love those who find us disgusting and good material for torture chambers or gas ovens. To be told when young that we cannot love those whom we are instinctively attracted distorts and impedes our progress in the human school of love. It creates a crisis in our personal development—a danger, but also an opportunity.

But, eventually—by discovering that life is exactly about learning how to love and not excluding even those who exclude us—we move towards loving like God. Embraced, losing and finding ourselves in this new love, led beyond any fantasy of fulfilment, we are divinised. The theological mantra of the early church was 'God became human so that human beings might become God.' That's what we are learning. We come home. Our humanity is explained by it even as it is blown apart beyond limitation.

All this should be obvious to anyone whose Christian faith comes from the gospel and their experience in their 'inner room' of prayer. Yet, if faith instead derives only from cultural distortions claiming to be 'true Christianity', the essential message is lost, hope is crushed, and humanity everywhere is diminished. Indeed, because a particular form of the perversion of the Christian faith is so powerfully at work in American politics today, it may well be the end of us all.

What happens when by such a distorted version of the gospel you are indoctrinated to feel that 'being gay' means being sinful and unnatural, even evil. If you allow yourself to love those you are instinctively drawn to, you are no longer loved by God. The closet begins, and with it gay-bashing by people who do not even know they are in the closet themselves. A dark secret is whispered in your ear, that if you love those you are attracted to, you will be expelled from God's school of love if you

dare to explore and enact it sexually? This is one of the horrific flaws and sins of institutional Christianity, Pentecostal, Reform or Catholic. It needs to be exposed and publicly repented of. This book is a courageous and prophetic contribution to this work of Christianity in repenting for such a cruel and stupid sin. Without blaming or demonising their oppressors, the contributors here fearlessly call the churches to repentance.

Since the invention of homosexuality as an 'abnormality' requiring punishment, repression or curing, whole societies were fooled into thinking of it as a major crime against humanity. The latest absurdity is that it undermines the 'family'! Sex as a whole thus became legalised and controlled by social ideas of 'sexuality'. As a result, even 'normal' sexual expression acquired a tinge of dirtiness and naughtiness. The best were sexless or at least publicly so. The invention of homosexuality demanded the invention of heterosexuality, two aspects of a spectrum that became polarised and antagonistic. Men, women, straights and gays all need liberation from this. Religion and secular society scored own goals when they invented homosexuality as a perversion. Every kind of love divinises us. But medical-sounding words, products of fake science, were coined, offensive labels invented and stuck with long-lasting glue on human beings who in truth exist to discover themselves through the ascent of love as living images of God. This was denied to those attracted by love with their own sex.

Instead, their self-discovery was blocked, their youths tortured, their old age often ending in loneliness and accumulated shame. There were heroes, of course, and lucky ones who could move to more civilised societies than those that would imprison or execute them. But for many, even today, the wonder of life was poisoned. The gay liberation revolution struck back, not violently (as they had been treated) but with outrageous humour and shockingly open excess. Thanks to those brave and crazy pioneers.

In this book, another revolution is underway in gay Christians. Describing faith in the light of their 'sinful' sexuality is part of the transformative revolution of the gospel itself. As you read this book, I hope you will see what I mean by hearing what these writers say. Regardless of your own sexual preference, if your faith is not deepened by seeing how their faith became more authentic as a result of their

existential and social ordeals, please read them again. Patently, this is not only about Christian faith. Christianity, Judaism and Islam and all other institutional religions have much to be confronted with by their gay members. A new spiritual solidarity is waiting to be discovered in an interfaith work of restoring health and truthfulness to religion itself.

Now that the cat of inclusive love is out of the bag into which religious thinkers had pushed it, what next? Reasonable people know that the sticky labels of sexual orientation are not very different from those concerning being left-handed or having eyes of different colours. Different, not worse. And there are advantages to being different. This book is part of a process of recovering our full humanity and as in any process there will be stages (counter-attacks and defeats included) but progress is now inevitable.

The first stage is being as open and honest about one's own nature as one cares to be. This may be in Gay Pride parades, in intelligently confronting religious bigotry with its lack of logic, double standards and hypocrisy: and for its being so un-Christlike in its rejection of wisdom and kindness. Thoughtful and moving books like this collection have a quieter but powerful contribution to make to the major metanoia that religion and societies need. We may need to be shocked and challenged in order to change. But we also need to have hearts and minds tenderly converted. This is a global and historical issue, of course, but individual voices and personal stories, as we read them here, touch hearts, change minds and make the spiritual truth inescapable.

The second stage is to remember human wisdom about same-sex love and its intimate expression in all cultures and periods of history. The first piece of recorded literature (four thousand years old)—the *Epic of Gilgamesh*—describes the relationship between the king and his companion Enkidu. No apologies are necessary. It is about love without the shadow of secrecy or shame—although modern scholars often feel uneasy about labelling it. It is both erotic and cosmic. The Sufi poet and scholar Rumi and the mysterious Shams Tabrizi fell in ecstatic love that brought them emotional death, but also birthed one of the greatest of all mystical poets. I remember the look of shock and confusion when a friend of mine learned that the Sonnets of William Shakespeare, or most of them, were written to a man. David and Jonathan. Hildegard and

Richardis. Aelred of Rievaulx's *Spiritual Friendship*. John Henry Newman and Ambrose St John. These examples have only one thing in common: they involve love between members of the same sex and were, in the fullest, non-religious sense, holy and divinising. But each manifestation of love is unique and mysterious, involving the open, inexpressible 'secrecy' inherent in the human heart.

The third aspect of this process testifies to the way in which all the crimes of homophobia may eventually be forgiven and reintegrated in the one great love. Everyone raised to feel shame and self-rejection for their sexual nature is pushed against the margins. False identities may be created to protect and to survive socially. But marginalisation also frees from attachment to any construct of identity. The rejected person and group touch the overlapping zones between the social, psychological and spiritual. Being excluded and marginalised, the risk is to lose our sense of personal worth and true identity. Those who are marginalised need extra support and solidarity but often have a gift for it that socially acceptable people lack. On the margins of the respectable, beyond the pale, we can also discover how close we are to our true self, the kingdom of heaven where love overflows all labels and boundaries. This may come in flashes of deep prayer. But a contemplative practice will bring us directly to it and then integrate it with our still-to-be-concluded life story.

Meditation is simply such a practice, woven into daily life, redeeming the spilled wine of love and healing the split identities that cause mental illness and psychological dysfunction, reluctance to trust, blocking basic freedom to accept and give love. Meditation is found in all branches of the wisdom traditions. It is the healing of the rejected, oppressed and broken heart. It also creates community among those who practice it, establishing a community of faith among people of different beliefs and orientations.

My personal thanks and congratulations to Eros Shaw for commissioning and compiling this collection of Christian gay perspectives. It is brave, timely and necessary, and also part of a now irreversible wave of the Holy Spirit bringing us back to human normality.

Dom Laurence Freeman OSB
Director, World Community for Christian Meditation

Foreword 2

This is a profoundly important book that gives voice to Chinese LGBTQI+ Catholics living inside and outside of China. These testimonies are hugely insightful into the heartfelt desires, hopes and anguishes of Chinese men and women. Homosexuality may have been legalised in 1997 in China, but LGBTQI+ face daily hardships as practicing Catholics due to the legacy of external influences in China dating as far back as the Tang Dynasty. This is a similar story for India, where I come from, where homosexuality had a level of acceptance and was celebrated in literature and various forms of cultural depictions found in paintings and sculptures. External political and moral codes of Christianity and repressive sexual mores forced homosexuality to become illegal. The struggles for acceptance and equality in society may have been won in China, but the legacy of skewed Christian views on homosexuality have scarred many LGBTQI+ Catholics, mainly due to the conservative positions of their families. Yet despite this, there are some beautiful and poignantly expressed stories about the tensions of a love of a lover and for their religion when Went (Fuzhou) says "God, tell me what to do." Elsewhere Hope Hebei says "I finally took that step, fell into the abyss. I am in love."

These fears and desires are not unique to China, they are human traits found the world over. They clearly demonstrate the ordinary, everyday dreams that homosexual people, just like heterosexuals, have for love and intimacy. Some found help and support from friends, others from an empathetic Catholic priest. Nonetheless, the struggle of 'coming out of the closet', to live an open and authentic life as a gay person is an ongoing battle. Their stories, which we can all identify with to some degree, makes for compulsive reading. I cannot recommend this work by Eros highly enough.

Ruby Almeida
Co-chair of Global Network of Rainbow Catholics
Chair of LGBT+ Catholics Westminster
Chair of Bridge and Embrace, India
Former chair of Quest, pastoral support for LGBT+ Catholics

Foreword 3

I must confess: personally, I don't like to tell my life story as a gay Catholic. I try to avoid it, whenever I can, because it's a painful exercise to remember my personal 'dark age' when I was between 18 and 23 years old.

I don't like to remember the period of shame in which I was drowned, when I understood that my sexual feelings were what the stigmatising word '*schwul*' (gay) meant. I don't like to remember the day when for the first time I wanted to come out to a friend, but my mouth didn't allow it to happen for several hours. A powerful taboo was silencing me and I had to collect all my courage to overcome it.

I don't like to remember my coming out to my parents. They were furious because I destroyed their dreams. I learned that unconsciously my mother regarded me as a girl, that my father still dreamt that I would become a priest and that managing the impression our family gives to its neighbours was more important for my parents than my chance to live openly in my hometown.

And I don't like to remember the time when I was working in a Catholic orphanage in Hamburg. The youngsters started mocking me, accusing me of being gay. I was helpless and they noticed this, so they repeated it again and again. Finally, I started to shout back, throwing homophobic insults against them. I didn't even know exactly what they meant.

But in the midst of all these bad experiences, I also had very good experiences with my Church, because there were always priests and lay theologians who inspired me and there were friends who supported me in my coming-out struggle. They strengthened my faith and helped me to understand: 'I am okay' whatever the doctrine of the church may say about gay people.

At some point in my mid-20s, it became very clear to me that I was called by God to work for the recognition of moral equality of lesbian and gay people in the Catholic Church. And I simply followed my vocation: I

started the Gay Theology a study group, and edited the journal *Werkstatt Schwule Theologie* (Gay Theology Workshop) for a couple of years. I wrote my doctoral dissertation about the roots of Christian homophobia and initiated monthly Eucharistic services for queer people—first in Münster, where I studied, then in Munich, where I live now. Finally, I became an activist in the European Forum of LGBTQI+ Christian Groups and now in the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics.

Meanwhile, I have told my story quite often in public: to journalists and bishops, because I am convinced that only life stories can touch people's hearts and can lead to understanding and acceptance.

Based on this conviction, the European Forum collected life stories of 95 Christian lesbians from all over Europe, including its Eastern countries. The title of the book, *Let Our Voices Be Heard!* became our slogan and still is. Then, the European Forum started a project on autobiographical stories of Catholic lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans people in Europe. It was published in 2015 by Sandra Taylor and Hazel Barnes under the title *And God Saw It All Was Very Good*.

But if you look into this book, you won't find my story. Although I was involved in this project from the very first moment, I myself was not able to write down my life story and overcome the shame another time.

Knowing my own troubles, I appreciate it so much when other Catholic lesbian and gay people as well as bisexual, trans and intersex find the courage to tell their own stories and make them available as a resource of strength for others. Every story reveals the braveness of its author. You hold a treasure in your hands.

Dr Michael Brinkschröder

Project Leader Rainbow Pastoral in the Archdiocese of Munich and Freising
Co-founder and 2015–2017 co-chair of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics

Foreword 4

This book is pioneering in the Chinese world! It collects life stories of Chinese gay Catholics and their theological reflections on their dual identities, both gay and Catholic. It sorts out the Catholic Church's stance and comments on gay issues. It is also a literary creation of gay Catholics, a perfect combination of rationality and sensibility. This book lets you 'see' gay Catholics.

The first time I saw thousands of gay people was at the Gay Pride Parade in New York. It was in 2001, and I had not yet come out of the closet. In June of that year, I came to New York to look for an apartment and to visit a professor to prepare for the PhD programme in sociology that I was going to start in September. By chance, my second day in New York City was the Gay Pride Parade. I had not known about it before. That day I woke up early in the morning and was surprised to see the whole city filled with a sea of rainbow flags flying under the pure June sky. The city was strange to me, but the faces were all so familiar. They slowly lifted my sadness. At that time, I was still in a heterosexual marriage, but at that moment I discovered that there was a kind of happiness more suitable to me. I still remember that day when I stood by the roadside watching tens of thousands of people in the parade, meditating in the bustle of downtown. People were everywhere, but my heart was extremely lonely. Behind that loneliness was a kind of love that for many years I could not name but keenly imagined. Cheers came to my ears, constant and thundering, but all I heard was a long sigh in the wind.

I finally came out of the closet in 2006 and wrote my story, *Is Now the Future?* It was published in my home country, Malaysia. It has now been 11 years since I came out. I have often said that the best thing I have done in my life is coming out of the closet. Since 2001, I have been living in New York, and every June, I must participate in the Gay Pride Parade in the street along with tens of thousands of other gay people, an amazing sea of people, a touching crowd. I am not alone, and neither are you. Our love, in fact, has a name and we are singing the same song. This is a kind of love that has never

been lost in thousands of years! For me, the Gay Pride Parade is not just fun. It's a profound feeling that moves me. With millions of people taking to the street, although overwhelmed with a thousand sorrows and longings, I receive comfort in that moment.

More than 30 years ago, who would have imagined we could be so proud? More than 30 years ago, how many young people would have imagined that we are so many? When gays came out of the closet one after another, it was seen as a constant wave taking over society. More than 30 years ago, psychologists thought that homosexuality was a kind of psychosis, a rat running across a street with everyone crying to kill it! But one day in 1970, at a meeting of the American Association of Psychiatrists (APA), someone finally felt that they had had enough and went up to snatch a microphone from Irving Bieber, the most vicious anti-homosexual psychologist of that time. They shouted at him, "We are not sick! You are!" With time, more and more gay people stood up to bear witness to their happy life. We have both happy and unhappy days, like heterosexuals, but we are not sick!

In 1973, as more gays came out, more psychiatrists became acquainted with them and stood up to support them with scientific data and testimony, emphasising that homosexuality was not different from heterosexuality except in its sexual orientation. On December 15, 1973, the board members of the APA unanimously agreed that homosexuality was not a psychosis and expressed opposition to discrimination against gays. Opposition to homosexuality did not ease, however. Bieber lobbied vigorously, alongside psychologist Charles Socarides, in an attempt to reverse the trend (as a show of how paradoxical history can be, Socarides' son, Richard, who is gay, became an important adviser on gay and lesbian issues to US President Bill Clinton.) Eventually, 58 percent of the APA voted that homosexuality was not a disease, 37 percent opposed them, and the rest abstained. Under the principle of respect for the majority, homosexuality is no longer categorised as a disease. Since then, more gays have had the courage to come out, their lives bearing witness that the APA's resolution was correct. Time is fair. But time is neutral as well. What's truly 'proving' that homosexuality is not a sickness is not time, but the life that lives within time! Without these brave lives, time can accomplish nothing.

I have been told that we are not going to be able to come out, in Asia or in the Catholic Church, because it is not yet time to accept homosexuality. My response is always that the time to accept homosexuality will never come if no one comes out! New York's Gay Pride Parade witnessed history, witnessed lives, and created history! Time only pushes it forward. My dear, I hope we do not just wait for history, but witness it! I hope we can come out to support gay people. Whether homosexual or heterosexual, please do not give up the opportunity to create history. This is a golden, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity!

Although I am a Protestant pastor and theologian, I believe in the Holy and Apostolic Church. In this sense, I am a member of the Universal Church. I have always firmly believed that division and hatred, even indifference, are a great blasphemy and injury to God, to the Church and to the world! This book is not a defence of gay people and sexual minorities. This book is about sexual minorities bravely coming out to open themselves to the larger religious community and to let people see! Because of love, these gay Catholics also invite those who stand in superior positions to come into our world. I, therefore, recommend this book to you with the most humble and sincere heart. Thank you, Eros, my brother, for giving me this opportunity to recommend this book, so brave, and so beautiful. God bless you, and also through your work may God comfort every gay and lesbian who is suffering because of love.

Rev Dr Ngeo Boon Lin
Hunter College, City University of New York
Pastor, Metropolitan Community Church of New York

Foreword 5

Ignorance and lack of self-awareness are the roots of prejudice.

Through the first-person experiences shared by many gay friends in this book, we will gain a better understanding of the truth. The reader's duty is to listen humbly rather than to act as a judge.

Father John F Harvey, who served gay Catholics in New York, could be said to be the first teacher to enlighten me on this subject. Having read his books, I corrected some of my past prejudices against homosexuality and realised the Church's pastoral duty to minister to gay believers. Father Harvey had already passed away.

Love is a mystery, and heterosexuality, needless to say, is a mystery. In homosexuality, too, there are many unknowns that we still have not discovered. It is important that we listen and understand humbly. Unfortunately, people generally only criticise negatively, moving from ignorance to discrimination.

In the Catholic Church, many people reject the holding of discriminatory attitudes in principle, but in reality, they discriminate unconsciously. Pastors often regard gays as individual cases, objects for counselling, or even patients with mental illness, and rarely treat them as equal children of God in their actions.

Sexuality is not easy to control. The Catholic Church only approves of sexual behaviour in heterosexual marriages, while considering all other behaviour to be 'evil'. However, it is hard to say whether homosexuals or heterosexuals are uglier in this respect. Only taking sex crimes as an example, the vast majority of cases are committed by heterosexuals. As for non-criminal extramarital sex activities, it is very common for heterosexuals to have extramarital affairs, engage in prostitution, promiscuity and pornographic activities (including online activities), etc. It is very odd that in our first encounter with a gay person, our first thought is of him or her having sex with a member of the same sex, but a well-fed businessman doesn't lead us to imagine him consorting with his mistress. This is

discrimination without self-awareness.

Homosexuals and heterosexuals are also called to lead a life of Christian chastity, but this is a vow not many people can keep. We do not quibble over heterosexuals' weakness in this respect, but assume without hesitation that homosexuals are unclean in our first encounter with them.

Homosexuals pursue faith the same way as heterosexuals, and they reach goodness through the same spiritual practices, that is praying, reading the Bible, receiving the Eucharist, participating in masses and church life, etc.

When serving homosexuals, Father John F Harvey never considered so-called 'gay conversion (straightening) therapy' as his end, but rather treated them equally as the children of God, needing the same spiritual nourishment as any other Christians. I have reflected on this for a long time and finally figured it out. Father Harvey was right: If it were possible to make homosexuals 'turn around' by artificial approaches (i.e., psychological counselling and medicine), could not heterosexuals be turned into homosexuals in the same way? Is sexual orientation then something that can be freely decided by human beings?

God has his own plan in allowing homosexuality to exist in human love. It is only that we still cannot read his mind. What we can do is to open our hearts to recognise this phenomenon and eliminate our discriminatory behaviour, so that all people will enjoy equal dignity and status within the Church.

Fr Chan Moon Hung, Stephen OFM
Hong Kong

Foreword 6

What a wonderful project Eros has undertaken! At a time when Christianity is still young in China, and while many people might have counselled him away from a book like this, he has resolved to bring out into the open something that is very obviously related to the future of the Gospel in our world. And particularly in that new world for the Gospel which so much of China is. He opens up how the Good News of Jesus Christ contains, amongst its many, many implications, the possibility of openness and truth-telling about love between people of the same sex. These are part of the one, same communication of grace and mercy coming towards us from God.

Institutional Christianity, most certainly including the Catholic Church from within which Eros, like me, worships and writes, has suffered a huge loss of credibility in many Western countries as its leadership struggles with itself to catch up with the moral learning, good sense, and spiritual wisdom in matters LGBTQI+ that so many of its laity have displayed. These struggles bear witness to how difficult it has been for the Church, where it has long been in place, to undergo genuine learning concerning what truly is the Word of God and what instead are the traditions of men.

And no doubt the time will come when we will look back on this period, unable to imagine why such a simple matter was resisted with such passion, anger and misplaced righteousness; when the ordinariness and goodness of the relationships which LGBTQI+ people are able to share openly with their wider families make such obvious sense, and are so obviously a part of what Jesus was always bringing into being in his love for us.

For the moment, however, we are in the happy time in which we are moving between the 'inconceivable' and 'obvious' with much greater speed than many of us thought possible as recently as 20 years ago. And part of the happiness of this time is seeing the way in which young Catholics and other Christians in China are beginning to make sense of what it means to be someone whose Catholic love comes with an LGBTQI+ flavor. The

happiness is because of the serene and normal way in which the contributors approach the question, knowing that truthfulness and love are the only way to live out an authentic confession of faith over a lifetime. And therefore of the profoundly loyal and Catholic sense in which they are not fighting something for ideological reasons, but know that with honesty and adult conversation, truth will out. And truth will not be a slogan. It will be manifested in lives lived richly, with a deep spiritual witness to the love of Jesus.

This is the feature I am most impressed by in Eros' project: his realisation that he is not asking people for simple witnessing, which could lead to so many trite repetitions of this or that orthodoxy: religious, political or cultural. He has asked for, and is expecting, something more: hints of the signs that emerge when Confessors of the Faith have kept hold of the wonder of the love that holds them, even in the midst of very great political, cultural, and, yes, religious, adversity.

These Confessors of faith will be pastors of the future Church, for they will have demonstrated in their lives that they did not abandon the sheep when the wolf of pious-seeming hatred of LGBTQI+ people threatened to destroy their loved ones. So many other would-be pastors, starting off with good intentions, run away when they hear this wolf howl. The friends and colleagues who Eros has brought together here show us something of what it looks like to have found yourself forced, by love, to stand your ground, and how the wolf deflates when it is faced with such faith.

I most wholeheartedly recommend this project and wish it the widest possible readership.

James Alison
Theologian, priest and author

Foreword 7

Coming Out Stories Bring New Light to Our Catholic Church

Stories have a powerful influence on the life of faith, and personal stories magnify that influence. In the Gospels, Jesus often uses stories, in the form of parables, to explain the ways of God. In other places, Jesus shows that listening to the stories of people is an important facet of Christian ministry.

LGBTQI+ Catholics need to tell the stories of their faith journeys so that our Church's communal faith life can grow more deeply and authentically. Their stories of struggle and joy, challenge and grace, reveal to the wider Church how the Holy Spirit is working in our communities. These personal stories, often referred to as 'coming out stories', are testimonies to liberation, authenticity, and holiness.

'Coming out' is a shorthand term for coming to recognise, affirm, and share the journey of acceptance of sexual orientation or gender identity. It is often a deeply personal and spiritual experience. Coming out stories are testimonies of faith, courage, discernment, and risk. The lessons that can be learned from such stories can benefit *all* Catholics, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. So, when LGBTQI+ people speak their truths, they do so not only for the good of themselves but for the good of the whole Church. Coming out stories are indeed a gift to the Church.

The coming out experience is primarily what distinguishes LGBTQI+ people from the general population. All LGBTQI+ people have had to come to an acceptance of a truth about themselves, which is usually very

different from what the mainstream culture tells them they should be experiencing. Often, they have had to come to this acceptance with little support, and sometimes against great antagonism. They have had to find the courage to speak this truth to others, usually a little at a time, and sometimes with negative consequences. No other group of people has to do this. No other group's difference is as invisible as it is for LGBTQI+ people. No other group's difference carries such visceral reactions. No other group's difference touches on love and sexuality, which are sensitive and vulnerable areas of life.

Usually, LGBTQI+ people have no role models for themselves as they are growing up. Often, they have received many negative messages about who LGBTQI+ people are. Many experience outright pressure from family members or friends not to accept their sexuality or identity. As a result, one spiritual gift that many LGBTQI+ people develop is the ability to tell the truth. After having lived a portion of their lives denying or lying about who they are, they are no longer content to lie in any situation about any topic. LGBTQI+ people can be wonderful truth-tellers, a gift from which many people in the Church can benefit.

Connected to this gift of truth-telling is the great gift of courage. Because so many LGBTQI+ people face strong rejection, ostracism, and, in some cases, physical harm if they acknowledge their orientations, they often have to develop a strong reservoir of courage in their psyches. This courage helps them get through difficult personal experiences they may face because of who they are. All people, from time to time, face difficult personal situations and need to rely on personal courage to get them through the situation. Courage, which is a common experience for LGBTQI+ people, can be a wonderful example for others, particularly young people.

A spiritual gift that springs from this sense of courage is the gift of self-love. Because negative messages about LGBTQI+ people often encouraged them to hate themselves, they have had to develop a strong sense of self-love to counter these earlier feelings. This self-love is not a selfish idea, but a healthy and holy sense of accepting oneself with a realistic assessment of one's strengths and weaknesses. Self-acceptance often helps to propagate the wonderful sense of humor that we see in the LGBTQI+ community: the ability to laugh at one's foibles.

Many LGBTQI+ people have the spiritual gift of compassion. The alienation and rejection that they suffer sometimes makes them more sensitive to other types of outcasts in society: the aged, the handicapped, the poor, the imprisoned. It is not a surprise that many often enter the helping professions as social workers, nurses, counsellors, church ministry, and advocates for the disenfranchised. Counteracting alienation and rejection has also helped them to develop a stronger sense of community with others because they have often had to build a circle of support for themselves rather than rely on only their families. LGBTQI+ people are often among a parish's most active and involved members, participating in a variety of ministry, social, and service projects.

Another spiritual gift that LGBTQI+ Catholics offer the Church is the witness of an examined life. Because their sexual love often goes against the official teachings of the Catholic Church, they have had to develop their consciences in ways that many heterosexual people do not. They have had to rely on prayer, study, and spiritual direction to come to a place in their lives where they can accept what their consciences are telling them. All Catholics need to pay more attention to their inner life and where God is calling them. Catholics need to nurture their consciences, and often LGBTQI+ people can show them the way.

Finally, what LGBTQI+ people know from personal experience is how intimately connected are the human experiences of sexuality and spirituality. Because they have often had to struggle to find the goodness of our own human longings and desires to give and receive love, we have also come to realise in a more personal way than most people, that sexuality is a spiritual experience that not only brings us into a closer relationship with another person, but also with God. This realisation is a gift that other people in the Church—heterosexuals, young people, older people, married, single, and celibate—are in desperate need of. LGBTQI+ Catholics can help the entire Church grow to see how holy sexuality truly is.

LGBTQI+ people are beginning to see themselves, not as victims, not as outsiders, but as bridges. They are helping to build bridges within our Church to allow people to grow out of their ignorance and misinformation, to live truthfully and courageously, to learn the importance of self-love and acceptance, to reach out to others in need

with compassion, to live with a reflective conscience, to see how sexuality can promote spiritual growth.

The stories of LGBTQI+ people remind us of the Scriptural lesson that the "stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone." These stories, told by people who have been despised and reviled, have the power to open up a whole new era of liberation for the Church. LGBTQI+ people, who are often marginalised and told they are not valuable, can in fact, greatly influence the direction our Church takes in the future. Nelson Mandela, the great South African liberation leader said words in his presidential inaugural address that are appropriate here:

> Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you NOT to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.

The stories in this book may challenge people to look at themselves and their faith in new ways. While that may be difficult, it is a good thing, and should be looked on as a gift from God. It is through this sharing of stories that our Church and our faith develop. Indeed, that is how Church and faith have always developed.

It is instructive to remember the words of another liberation leader as you read the stories in this book and find yourself challenged. Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador, who once offered these insights:

> A church that doesn't provoke any crises, a gospel that doesn't unsettle, a word of God that doesn't get under anyone's skin, a word of God that doesn't touch the real sin of the society in which it is being proclaimed—what gospel is that? Very nice, pious considerations that don't bother anyone, that's the way many would like preaching to be.

> Those preachers who avoid every thorny matter so as not to be harassed, so as not to have conflicts and difficulties, do not light up the world they live in.

May these stories help to bring light to our church and to our world!

Francis DeBernardo
Executive director, New Ways Ministry

Foreword 8

In recent years the Catholic Church, worldwide, has been struggling to make gay people feel fully welcomed. As Catholics, we have a long tradition of teaching about sexuality, and of ministering God's mercy in a variety of situations, including the complications that our sexual life frequently involves us in.

But there is another resource we have, which we do not use enough, and which this wonderful book edited by Eros supplies: the stories of gay Catholics themselves. To be able to tell one's story and to know that it has been listened to with respect, interest and compassion is one of the most important things any human being needs, but especially so for gay people, who have often experienced rejection and misunderstanding, not only in society as a whole, but also sadly in the Church itself.

In this book you will find stories that reflect the great variety of gay Catholics' experiences: stories of hurt but also of healing, stories of hiding but also of courage to speak the truth, stories of conflict between personal experience and official teaching, and attempts to bridge that gap. I pray that this book will have a wide readership, and that all who read it will grow in courage to speak their own truth and to help the Church develop its ministry in this important area.

Mgr Keith Barltrop
Diocese of Westminster chaplain to LGBT people

I. STORIES

For those Tongzhi priests and nuns whose silence speaks so clearly.

Mainland China

Growing Through Confusion to Clarity

Joseph, Beijing

I am Joseph, a gay Catholic. I was born in a parish in northern China and raised in a traditional Catholic family. I have always been a gentle and delicate boy, as well as a good student with excellent grades. Since I was a child I have been very attentive to rules and was always a good boy who followed every request and arrangement given by my parents and teachers, complied with rules set by the school, the Church, society and the nation. I was always a well-behaved kid in the eyes of my parents, teachers, relatives and neighbours, showered with praise and love from teachers, relatives and fellow church members. However, no one knew that this amenable child had a very different story hidden from their view.

Childhood

In the 1990s, religions revived in China and people were able to freely express their religious faith again. I remember that I started to be an altar boy when I was eight or nine years old and served for five or six years. I served more than four parish priests and witnessed the church grow from a small, simple building to a transitional one on a moderate scale, and eventually it was able to raise enough funds to design and construct a new church building. I experienced the transition from the Latin Mass to the vernacular one, that is, with the priest, who formerly faced away from the congregation, now turning around to face them, and with the altar now placed in the center. I have accompanied priests visiting other smaller parishes, participated in several ordinations of new priests, witnessed numerous wedding and funeral Masses, and celebrated many years' Christmas and Easter in the newly constructed church that could fit a thousand people. Looking back, that was undoubtedly the happiest time in my life.

But there was one unspeakable secret accompanying my growth. For as long as I can recall, I was unintentionally paying attention to those young and good-looking elder brothers in the Church, but totally uninterested in the pretty girls. As I grew, the feeling only got stronger, as did my confusion and doubts. Why was I like that? Why was I attracted to boys but not girls? Why was I different from others? Was it a sin? Was it in conflict with Church law? Sometimes when I was serving as an altar boy or taking part in a Mass, I worried if my filthiness would stain the holy rituals, or even worse, I was terrified that the devil might be hiding around me. Confusion, desperation, perplexity and worries consumed me for years! My innate ego and introvertedness also prevented me from discussing it with others. Over the years, I grew up along with the confusion. You can say that my affection towards the same sex began with the good-looking young men in the Church.

Teenage years

In the mid-1990s, information technology was not as advanced as it is today. The internet was not common, and the smartphone had yet to be invented. I was in my teens, and everything was pure, bright and lovely. During high school, a young man entered my life, bringing a wonderful sense of satisfaction. F was my classmate. In contrast to me, a 'perfect student', he was rebellious and had no interest in studying. But we had a special feeling the first moment we looked into each other's eyes. It was subtle, intriguing and wonderful at the same time. On the day of Hong Kong's handover, the school had a day off. I went to his home, sharing the joy of Hong Kong's return to mainland China, and also exchanging our feelings towards each other. Until graduation, we were like lovers, almost displaying our youthful affection on campus publicly.

As my sexual orientation became more and more apparent, stress from studies and uncertainties about the future also became more intensive, as did my feelings of guilt towards my parents. But it did not stop my feelings from growing. From one day to the next, I struggled in agony. Now looking back, I don't know how I managed to make it through with such determination. Maybe it was my faith that gave me strength. From that time I started to realise the differences between

myself and others. I began to search for answers in sociology books and articles whenever I had the chance. You could say my teenage years were the painful stage when I gradually came to know myself. It was when I began to have pure, natural, romantic feelings towards other boys, and it also marked my first love.

Becoming an adult

In 1998, I entered university—it was also the year when I turned 18. I left my hometown and had more interaction with the outside world. In my first two years, the internet was still uncommon. The well-intentioned advice that F gave me when we both graduated (he wanted me to change, one way or another) also led me to think deeply. Could one change their natural sexual orientation? Similarly, was it possible to turn a heterosexual person homosexual?

As I grew older, I realised that in a new stage of life and a new environment I should plan for my own future. I determined to change my timid, introverted personality by participating in more social events organised by the university. I kept myself occupied with work in the student union. I went to party after party during weekends. I even took part twice in intra-university competitions on behalf of my department. I joined a protest after the United States bombed the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia. During these two years, I rejected a girl who was the only female I could say I had a crush on in my entire life. I also turned down three other girls from other departments.

I do not know if my attempt to grow and change during these two years counted for much, but there is one thing I can be sure of: I have never negated myself, and never really tried to move towards the other end of the spectrum. Change came in the year 2000, when the internet seemed to have extended its reach to the entire world overnight. There were facilities for the internet in the university, and internet bars became popular outside the campus as well. In the early stage of categorised search by the internet portal Sohu, I could easily search for gay websites, dating forums, chatrooms, etc. Sometimes I even met classmates in those chatrooms. It felt like I had finally found a world that I belonged to. Even though the internet is a virtual world, the person on the other

end is real. I completed my self-understanding and identification. There was no more of the confusion and repression that I had for more than a decade. This was the stage when I first got to know the outside world as a young adult. I welcomed new self-identification and my release from the agony of the past.

After graduation, my interests led me to make a different decision from my classmates. In the first ten years after entering the workforce, I spent more time exploring both my career path and emotional orientation. I became more and more mature mentally, with diminishing desperation and confusion. I started to devote a lot of effort to work, but to be honest I was ashamed by the fact that I only attended church at Christmas. Three years ago, my life changed again. I broke up with my Protestant partner of several years. Along with some other eventful moments, it made me more independent, and I began taking better care of myself, getting to know my actual needs. I reunited with God, getting familiar with the times of the Masses and parish priests in various churches in Beijing. Whenever I travel, I must find time to visit the local churches and take part in their Masses.

The present and the future

Now, I am no longer trapped in petty confusion. I have started to think about the path of my life and the meaning of faith. Faith is an intrinsic part of me. God has always been with me, and Mother Mary has always been guarding us!

Faith is my power, giving me determination and calmness in this ever-changing society.

Faith is my spirit, bringing me respect and honor in this hollow, materialistic environment.

Faith is my support, making me calm and determined when I am lost and confused with no one else to rely on.

Faith is my gene, defining my temperament by merging with my cognition and showing through my behaviour.

Once I realised this, I felt like a completely new person, who no longer feels frustrated and helpless but, rather, independent and determined. My sexual orientation and my relationship with the Church

no longer bother me. They belong to different aspects without being in absolute conflict. Of course, there are still some people strongly opposed to LGBTQI+ people in modern society and in the Church, but Pope Francis, who was born in Argentina, one of the first countries to legalise same-sex marriage, has appealed for acceptance of gay people. This did not mean approval of same-sex marriages, but it was a huge encouragement. I believe that with the progress of society and the renewal of the Church, the LGBTQI+ community will be more tolerated by society one day. We should all leave our burdens to the past, face a better future and enjoy our lives with appreciation and faith.

A Small Wish

Wen Tao, Fuzhou

My name is Wen Tao. I was born to a rural family with parents and four siblings. My mother suffered from congenital heart disease, and her condition worsened after giving birth to me. When I was seven, my mother became severely ill. My father's cousin was a Catholic, and she advised us to join her faith. About half a year after we became Catholic, my mother died in peace. We did not give up our faith, and are still following God's steps in living out our religious lives. At that time, I thought my mother fell asleep rather than leaving us forever. After that, I became very lonely and rarely talked. When I turned eight, my father remarried and they gave birth to my younger sister. My life was even more unhappy. Every day I had to bear with the depressing atmosphere at home, and it hurt my self-esteem.

When I was a kid, I often slept with my cousin, and we even showered together. There was once—I don't know if I was scared or feeling lonely—I gave him a hug and he did not refuse it. Since then I developed affection towards men. I always wanted to peek at men showering. Every time I had a crush on someone, I wanted to look at his body, embrace him and passionately kiss him on the lips. These thoughts gave me a refreshing and exciting feeling.

From junior high, this feeling of mine only grew stronger and stronger. When I reached my last year, I had a crush on a girl. I spent every day following her, having meals with her. During my teenage years, I still did not understand my sexuality.

After graduation, I chatted with a stranger online one day. He said he liked me. I was curious and asked him to send me his pictures. It turned out he was a guy I knew. We talked a lot, and that was how I learned about the LGBTQI+ community. As I was curious about it, I looked up

'homosexuality' online and was fascinated immediately. I joined some QQ chat groups and made some friends online. They asked about my position and I was confused: what position? They explained to me that '1' and '0' mean 'top' and 'bottom' respectively. I gradually learned more about the slang of the LGBTQI+ community, and finally discovered what a 'booty call' was.

Getting more familiar, I had my first 'booty call' with one of my online friends. He asked me to come to his home, and I did. He looked quite mature and handsome, while I was quite embarrassed and shy. He initiated by touching me, and slowly moved his hands downwards. I did not resist, and to be honest it felt quite nice. He laid me down on his bed and began kissing me all over. He took off my clothes; I gave him my first time. It was the first time I had sex with a same-sex partner, and it confirmed my suspicions about my sexuality. I like men. I want to be with a man.

But in the terms of my faith as a baptised Catholic this was a violation of my body and a contamination of my soul. I was troubled and not sure what to do, but I could not let go of my desires. I was deeply lost, but when that happened, I always remembered God's mercy. I went to Church to seek help through adoring the Eucharist, hoping for God's guidance and enlightenment.

God, please tell me what I should do.

I told a priest about my situation, which felt like lifting a heavy burden off of my shoulders. I finally understood that just because I am gay, it does not mean that God and the Church would abandon me or refuse to accept me. The priest consoled me zealously, guiding me in making the right choices. God is really wonderful. Only when I let Him into my heart can I truly feel calm and joyful. I really liked the group activities in the Church. I was weak, so whenever I encountered difficulties Jesus would always stand by me, protect me.

Jesus, I trust you.

My sexual orientation is an undeniable fact. This identity is deeply rooted in my existence. I had a romantic relationship in the past. We fell in love online. We both enjoyed talking to each other, and we had great admiration for each other as well. We finally met in person and decided to be together. We had a very sweet time together: rented a house, went

to work together, shopped for groceries together, returned home and cooked dinner together. I felt such joy in having meals together. We were a lovely and happy couple who rarely argued. But once, when he took me to his family's home, we forgot to lock the door while we were making love in the room. His parents found us and were furious. They threatened to kill themselves if he did not stop 'disgusting and grotesque' affairs and get married. He was in agony in the following days, being forced by his parents to attend blind dates, doing things he never intended to do. Maybe I was weak at that time as well. I was not determined enough, and I was not willing to see my beloved man suffer like that. I broke up with him and was sad for a long time. Love between gays is not easy. Partners who love each other often cannot be together.

Now I still long for God's mercy, my family's understanding and my friends' support to let me come out of the closet. I hope to find someone who will not force himself into a heterosexual marriage, and I hope that we will have respect, understanding, acceptance, tolerance and love for each other. We will live together, love each other, own our little home, and enjoy a joyful life in God. This is my little wish. Lord have mercy.

Praise the Grace of the Lord

John, Shenzhen

My name is John, and I am Catholic. I am 39 years old, currently living in Shenzhen and working in the tourist industry. My partner and I have been together for more than three years. However, prior to 2013, I could not have imagined my current life. I thank God for his guidance, allowing me to gain a deeper understanding of both myself and my partner.

I first realised my sexual orientation in the winter holiday when I was 13. I suddenly realised that I had a crush on a male classmate. Of course, I dared not express my affection directly, but sought out every chance to be with him. He seemed to sense something from my behaviour. Once he said to me, "If you were a girl, I would definitely marry you." I was moved, but also saddened at the same time. Our relationship cooled down after he has a girlfriend. In that era, homosexuality was only a vague concept. That was why he did not define me as gay. Perhaps he thought I was just different from other boys.

I came across the Catholic faith by chance during this period and was then baptised. The Church at that time did not say anything related to homosexuality because they had no understanding of it. Until 2000, I read the teaching on homosexuality from the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*. At that moment I decided to follow the Church's teaching. The Catholic teaching on sexuality was founded on the reproduction of married couples. Anything outside of that was sinful. Since then whenever lustful thoughts arose, I prayed to suppress my desire. By nine months later, the internet had become a household essential in China. When I was browsing the net at home, I accidentally came across an LGBTQI+ website with lots of nude pictures. My resolve of nine months collapsed all at once. I realised there were a lot of people like me

attracted to people of the same sex. I felt like a lost child finally finding the path to his home. My life entered a confusing and conflicted period.

I longed for romantic love with a same-sex partner. I also longed for God in my life. On one side of the scale, I had my same-sex love; on the other side, it was my faith. But following the Church's teaching I had accepted that sexual behaviour between members of the same sex was a sin. That was why I never talked about faith or received the Eucharist when I had boyfriends in the past.[1] Going to Church seemed to become a social activity. However, my heart desired to return to the right track because I longed to receive the Eucharist, eager to be close to the Lord. I saw no alternative to breaking up with my previous partners. I passed my days torn apart by love and faith. I could not see any hope in my relationships with same-sex partners because I did not acknowledge my sexuality. I never made the effort to maintain my relationships. Naturally, they ended rather soon.

Since I saw little hope of ending this dilemma of love and faith, I decided to live a celibate life and focus on seeking the Lord. I did not see any other way out. I was the only child in my family, and my parents were non-Christians. They always hoped that I would get married and have babies soon. I had been preparing for the right moment to communicate to my parents my wish to become religious. However, during this same time, I met my current partner. At first, we were both not interested in each other. Over time, we found that we had a lot in common between us. Our views were similar. Our desire for love was realised. But whenever I faced the Church, I felt repressed or even desperate.

In 2013, at the recommendation and encouragement of a gay friend, I participated in the Amplify Forum in Hong Kong. It was Asia's largest LGBTQI+ Christian forum, mainly constituted of Protestant pastors and believers. I was uncomfortable in the workshop I participated in the morning that I arrived. I felt it was a violation of Church traditions and teachings to talk about homosexuality from the perspective of faith, not to mention stating 'God loves and accepts homosexuality.' I felt repelled

[1] The Eucharist is essential for Catholics. It commemorates Jesus' deliverance to his disciples at the Last Supper. Catholics believe that the Eucharist is the true body of Jesus.

by these ideas at first. That was until the opening ceremony in the evening, with around 300 participants and their partners attending, I saw many happy, smiling faces around me. This joyful atmosphere melted my heart. I felt the intense love of the Lord. At that moment, I suddenly accepted my identity. I could hear verses from Luke 4:18-19, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." It was such a wonderful experience, relieving me from the repression of all these years while enabling me to taste what is meant by true freedom.

After the gathering, I went back to Shenzhen. The Holy Spirit was urging me to share the love and relief I had experienced with other LGBTQI+ Christians with a similar background. Although I received a lot of encouragement from the forum, suggesting I start a group in the city where I lived, I still felt uneasy since I did not think I had the leadership abilities to organise it. But with the loving urge of the Holy Spirit, I could not reject my mission. I started to search for LGBTQI+ Christians in Shenzhen. Some people did not like my suggestion but others were interested. In the very beginning, we have only five people gathering together, praying, sharing a meal together, as well as enjoying outdoor activities. Later on, a brother from Hong Kong took the initiative to lead our Bible study, bringing us a whole new understanding of the Bible. Today, our group is still growing slowly. Through these gatherings, we experience the blessings of God and the growth of our lives. We thank God for letting my partner get to know Him through the group and be baptised.

Rethinking the path behind me, I thank God for helping me integrate my identity in faith, changing my perception towards many things and people. I also thank God for letting me find my life partner, allowing us to experience God's love through the love between us. Living out love, being the witnesses of love, showing the greater glory of God—these are our common life goals.

I pray that more LGBTQI+ Christians can learn to accept their identity. In the eyes of God, love pays no heed to gender, skin colour, or sexuality because God Himself is love.

How Can There Be a Perfect Solution in This World, One That Fails neither Jesus nor You?

Hu Shang Xue, Shanghai

> "In the eyes of ordinary brothers and sisters, this tendency seems to be equal to hell, as if we should change the address to Sodom on our ID card."

Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. But early in the morning he returned to the temple area, and all the people started coming to him, and he sat down and taught them. Then the scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery and made her stand in the middle. They said to him, "Teacher, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery. Now in the law, Moses commanded us to stone such women. So, what do you say?" They said this to test him so that they could have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and began to write on the ground with his finger. But when they continued asking him, he straightened up and said to them, "Let the one among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her." Again he bent down and wrote on the ground. And in response, they went away one by one, beginning with the elders. So he was left along with the woman before him. Then Jesus straightened up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" She replied, "No one, sir." Then Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you. Go [and] from now on do not sin anymore." (John 8:1-11)

This was the punishment I received from a priest after a confession: reading the Gospel story of Jesus' pity for the sinful woman several times.

I have always wondered if it were me standing in front of Jesus, would he have said the same? If it was 15 years ago, I would go and ask a priest. But now I will not. It has taken me 33 years of my life to realise that God, that Jesus, have always been loving me and forgiving me. I also deeply understand that "For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him" (John 3:17). Every time I recite this passage of the Gospel, I can feel that he would be saying the same thing to me.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta once said: "Everyone was created by God, and we know that God loves us. No matter which religion we believe in, we have to understand that if we want to truly love the others, we must first learn to forgive."

Unfortunately, not all of Jesus' disciples have the wisdom to understand this. I was once suspended from receiving sacraments by a certain parish priest. This was considered the worst punishment next to excommunication. I had been regarded as an 'alien' and avoided by some priests. They avoided talking to me, and if they had to talk to me, they always chose to do it in public. Everywhere I went, I was labelled a 'second-class Church member.'

Thank God that I was eventually able to meet a compassionate priest after many years. He did not condemn me or frighten me with threats of judgment day and hell. He only gently comforted me. His words moved me: "maybe you can't leave this lifestyle for now, but remember, God won't leave you either."

Not all priests have the courage and wisdom to respond to a confession in this way, because I am guilty of having a sinister sexuality. I remember a scripture once said, this is against the Holy Spirit and such sin is not to be forgiven. In fact, I can understand why this is such an unforgivable sin in the eyes of many Catholics. We are often involuntarily judging someone else on behalf of God, hating sins as well as sinners. This is human nature.

Maybe you, now reading this line, also want to raise the stone in your hand...

My baptismal name is Joseph. I happen to have been born in the era of China's reform and opening. With religious policy loosened, I became a Roman Catholic at the age of four. Since my youth, I have been living

in the Church environment. In the eyes of priests, I was an enthusiastic member of the church; in the eyes of other fellow Church members, I was a good child with excellent academic performance, with a gentle and friendly personality. I was filial to my parents, and I respected God. Even in my rebellious adolescence, when many peers at the same age left the Church or were ashamed of having a religion, I was still active in the parish, participating in or even organising charitable or spiritual activities. It was because I had always felt truly blessed by God's love.

In fact, in many parishes, there are several members or even a group of people like me who have deep feelings for God and His Church. We were dedicated to serving the Lord, willing to contribute, actively taking part in the parish choir, altar service, volunteer groups, prayer groups and so on. In the eyes of many priests and Church members, we were good members of the Church deserving praise. Yet, at the same time, there was always a certain aspect that was mysterious and well-hidden, as if it was invisible, such as the place of marriage in our lives.

This is because we shared a common identity: gay Catholics with a traditional Chinese cultural background. This is an identity that cannot be accepted in both society and the Church. It is an identity that could lead to being stoned to death in certain countries or national groups. It is an identity that could be so contradictory that one might not accept even oneself.

The Bible says, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). There is a desire for love in human nature: always thinking that there would be someone you meet in your life, holding your hand and integrating love into your life. The years spent together would be peaceful and comforting. Love would be like a small stream of water flowing quietly and eternally. Even when prosperity falls apart, you two would be together, growing old in each other's company. You are willing to spend all your tenderness and gentleness on each other, becoming old together in everlasting love. Everyone has his or her vision for love, but I, as a man, was not desiring a woman. What I was truly looking forward to was meeting 'him' among the sea of people, one with whom I can live together in a city, growing old together.

Fifteen years ago, I first understood what love was. I began to fantasise about my love life, dreaming of holding my other half's hand

and kneeling in front of the altar, receiving the blessing of God through the Sacrament of Matrimony. I even thought I must ask the priest to hold a Latin Mass, as I had witnessed it during my childhood. But when I realised I only had desires for the people of the same sex, I was stunned as if I was struck by a bolt of lightning: our priests had been teaching us since we were young that it was wrong! I looked it up in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, and it was written in black and white that this was "intrinsically disordered." God would not favour this. What could I do? What should I do? How was I going to spend my entire life?

In that year, I turned 19. At that moment, my world was falling apart!

For many, many dark nights, with candles lighting up the room, I knelt in front of the Sacrament, begging God to relieve me from this suffering. For many, many dawns, I wiped away my desperate tears in the rising sunlight. A young man, raised in a traditional Chinese cultural environment that stressed filial piety, receiving the baptism and education of the Roman Catholic Church, suddenly realised that he himself was a sinner who would never be accepted by Chinese ethics nor the teachings of the Church. Humans are fortune's fool! My life was destined to be a scene of sorrowful tears being blinded by the sunshine, and the inner cold hidden from the warmth of sunlight. This strange love that was not tolerated by the world was forcing me to walk a path of endless darkness, cold and loneliness! It left me feeling the biting chill even in spring and made me feel lonely even when I was surrounded by people.

Darkness. Endless darkness. Many years later, when I read *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* of St John of the Cross,[1] I could feel only that my darkness was much heavier than his. The saint was only facing the darkness of spiritual emptiness. Despite feeling panic, he was not close to despair. It was an inevitable stage in spiritual formation. What I was facing was a cloud of darkness resulting from a complete opposition to the Church's teachings. A sinful darkness. A rejected darkness. A darkness that was going to be accepted neither in heaven nor in hell.

My young self began to hate himself!

---

[1] A classic book in spiritual formation, written by St John of the Cross (1542-1591), which explores "the dark night of the senses" and "the dark night of the soul."

I thought about giving up my education and starting a life in seminary, to be away from temptation and sin. I told my spiritual director that I could not take another step forward. One more step and I would fall into the abyss. The spiritual director answered: If it was really an abyss, I would fall into it even if I entered a seminary. As I recall his words many years later, they were indeed fair and right. Since 2000, a series of sex scandals committed by clergy were exposed in the United States. I supposed many of them fell into the abyss I was facing. My own failure would be insignificant, but it would be disastrous if I tainted the reputation of the Church and other clergy. Since then, I no longer hoped to be a priest.

Owing to the limited information available in Mainland China, education received by priests was often backward. Most priests never received training on pastoral care for Catholics with a same-sex orientation. I used to be eager for the guidance of priests, but every time I sought it, all I got was accusation and criticism. Noticing the disappointed or even disgusted looks on their faces, I could only give up, choosing to remain silent and even hidden from them. I turned to seek information from Church websites in Hong Kong and Macau, realising that the Church was not against same-sex orientation but same-sex behaviours. They hoped we would stay celibate. At that time, I was determined to obey the Church teachings, because the Church was always right. I even looked for forms of penance, trying to stay away from all temptations.

However, abstinence and being away from a life of affection were not something that an 18-year-old could bear. After suffering painfully, I failed.

I finally took that step and fell into the abyss.

I fell in love.

That was on December 3, 2001. Many years later, I started to forget his face, but the taste of my first love has become a part of my memory. It was a typical love story every young person would experience: dining out together, watching movies, shopping together, using every Chinese or Western festival as a reason for dating, feeling that not seeing each other for a day was as painful as not seeing each other for three years... It was so sweet that it almost made me melt. Everyone experiences the same

thing in their love life, but it is memorable and worthy of remembering.

The relationship lasted three years, its end marked by his cheating on me. Afterwards, I met someone with the same name as mine in Year Four. He walked into my life, sharing many of my interests, and later on we rented a flat together. We graduated together in the field of design. It was brief, but I was truly happy.

Unfortunately, we were no exception to the rule 'graduation means breaking up'. I headed south for work while he continued his studies. I once asked if we had a future. He said, "I hope so, but I need to get married. I can't afford to disappoint my parents."

I ended the relationship in tears. Many years later he called me and I flew to attend his wedding in the city where he lived. The bride was a gentle girl. She took his hand walking on the red carpet. Both sets of parents were so happy. I wiped away the tears on my face with a hand that had turned red from clapping. I gave them my blessing with a smile. Afterwards, my friend asked me if I had imagined I was the person walking on the red carpet with him. I was at a loss. It was not because I did not get to walk with him on the red carpet. It was because in this era, we would never even dare to dream of walking down the aisle together. Blessing only belonged to the marriages recognised by society and families.

Everyone wants to be recognised and accepted. I was no exception. I have come out to my godchildren. In return, I got only shock and questioning. Even after such a long time, I still remember the expressions on their faces. My goddaughter asked me gently but firmly, "If you think there can be love between two men, can there be love between parents and children? Or even humans and animals?" Questions like this were almost guaranteed whenever I came out to someone. In the eyes of ordinary brothers and sisters, our orientation seems to be equivalent to hell, as if we should change the address on our ID card to Sodom.

We are invisible people living in the darkness and hiding in the shadows, and it seems that we are cannot be exposed to the sun's light.

Life continued. I have experienced several relationships. Five years. Three years. One year. There was helpless parting. There was also a break-up due to incompatible personalities. I have also enjoyed periods of being single. In a blink of an eye, it has been 15 years since I entered this circle.

These 15 years could be written up as a book, and it would be full of ridiculous words and bitter tears. After all these experiences, I have grown and changed a lot. The only thing that has not changed is that I always rely on God and believe in love. I still believe in the idea that the basis of marriage must be love.

I choose not to marry because of the story of a wife of a gay man. We did not know each other. I only heard her crying on the radio by chance. She talked about her husband who was a civil servant. She had a well-behaved daughter. In the eyes of outsiders, they were a model family, with stable income and loving relationships. But in fact, the couple only had sex once after marriage, and it was only for passing on the lineage. Every night she returned to her empty bedroom, while the man she waited for was hanging out with another man. He only returned home in the early morning, just for appearances, so others would see them send their daughter to school and go to work together. She did not dare to divorce him due to financial pressure, and her traditional mindset also made her deeply ashamed to talk about it. This story saddened me a lot. I pitied the poor woman and hated the selfish man. But at the same time I could understand his helplessness and sadness. I still remember today the woman yelling on the radio: "I don't care if you love another man, but why do you force me to lose my entire life's happiness?" I know that I cannot deceive any woman. Even if my parents beg me and force my hand, I still have no right to harm a girl who was also raised in the love and care of her parents.

This decision is very difficult. My parents are getting older, and every time I notice their gray hair, see their eager looks and hear their sighs, there is guilt in my heart. But I believe firmly that everyone should have a bottom line of moral values. Despite being demanding, I should continue to hold to it.

The word 'forced marriage' is no stranger to people living in this era. Many LGBTQI+ folks have chosen to leave their hometowns and fled to major cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangdong and Shenzhen. On the one hand, this way they can stay away from their parents; on the other hand, big cities' hustle and bustle can give them more opportunities to find their hidden love. In this underground world, everyone has their own radar, picking up the same frequency signals, and continuing many

secret stories that cannot be told to the outsiders. Also, couples marrying late, DINKs and singles are more common in large cities. It is easier to blend in and appear not so different from the others.

Yet we not only need to hide in the city, we also need to hide in the workplace, hide in our public life, and, most painfully, hide in the Church.

Everyone has different identities to society, to their family and to their friends and lovers. If I had to give up most of them, only leaving two, my choice would be to remain gay and Christian. The former was a genetic decision, and I have no choice. The latter is the support of my life, and it has become integral to me.

At first, I was like most gay Christians, choosing to hide my sexual identity in order to continue serving in the Church, seeking salvation in confession after confession. I was always glad to serve the Church, no matter whether I was studying or after I started working. Whether in my hometown or not, I am still glad to spend my free time in parish service. It has become my lifestyle, and in doing so, I also harvest the blessings and grace of God. At the same time, with the passage of time and the accumulation of experience, my awareness of my homosexuality was deepening. Having a love life on one side and having confessions on the other side seemed to become a vicious circle. Every time the priest wanted me to repent what I had done, I asked myself, "Is love really sinful under this sexual orientation? Do I really need to repent of it?" In terms of the logic of the Church, LGBTQI+ Catholics are a false proposition.

This proposition plagues many LGBTQI+ faithful in the Church. This gap seems to have discouraged many people. I have encountered many brothers and sisters who have been entangled in this same agony. The result was either desperately giving up their faith or choosing to numb their conscience, living two separate lives at the same time.

I have no intention of giving theological arguments here. Whether this proposition is attributed to dogmatic theology or ethical theology, many scholars have already contributed to the debate, and indeed their work is inspiring or encouraging for those who are currently troubled. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* clearly states "homosexual acts are intrinsically disordered" (CCC #2357). The *Persona Humana* published

by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith also asserted that "homosexual acts are objectively disordered." Whenever I read these words, I imagine the pens in the hands of the theologians who drafted the texts shaking, fuelled by disgust and anger. But eventually the Church had to acknowledge that there is a congenital factor in this tendency and had to say "homosexual persons are called to chastity" (CCC #2359). This is another false proposition. If innate homosexuals are a part of God's plan, and there are many same-sex phenomena in nature as well, recalling that "God looked at everything he made, and found it was very good" (Genesis 1:31), then how can it be "intrinsically disordered"? Were we made by the devil? I believe that God did not give him such rights. What is even more ridiculous is that the words "called to chastity" are actually euphemisms for "called to castration in the name of faith." Jesus Christ mentioned that "Some were incapable of marriage because they were born so; some, because they were made so by others; some, because they have renounced marriage, for the sake of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 19:12). God has given sexuality to all brothers and sisters, including homosexuals. He has given us the desire to love, and allowed all the freedom to choose. In this case, why would the Church force a man or a woman who has a normal healthy body and longs for love to stay single and chaste? This is castration in the name of faith. It is also an unprecedented paradox.

In fact, each theory has its own logic. Arguing will not solve the problem. What is more, we are weak and have little space to speak out in the era we live in. Like the tax collectors and prostitutes of the time of Jesus, our only fate is being despised, reviled, and rejected.

Fortunately, the coming of Jesus is not for the so-called 'righteous people' but for us sinners. In a sense, Jesus was a part of the marginalised of that era, preaching words that challenged classic views, caring for people who were rejected by society, even rescuing the Samaritans who had been cast aside by the Jews, and rejected by so-called orthodox preachers and Pharisees. As minorities ourselves we can understand the weak and marginal. In this respect, I believe that we are much closer to Christ.

The coming of Jesus is not to establish an erudite theory, but to re-establish our relationship with the Heavenly Father. We need to pay

attention to the fact that faith is not meant to be justified with theories. It is not theories in books or a type of scholasticism. Faith is an experience. It is the call to abandon everything in the world. When we are facing the Father of the Universe on our own, it is all about our experience with Him. This experience has nothing to do with right and wrong, logic or laws. Only one question matters: He has given up his life to save ours; have we repaid his love with our own?

For me, faith has nothing to do with other people, and same-sex orientation should not be a stumbling block for me to come to Christ. I was born into an ordinary but harmonious family. My parents are simple but loving. I searched for the root cause of my orientation, whether it was nature or nurture, genetic or environmental. After many struggles and much pain, I have become more and more comfortable with myself. My homosexuality is an undeniable fact and it was not my choice. I believe it was God's choice, just as God chose for me to be a man, to have yellow skin and dark eyes, and allowed me to grow over six feet tall. These are merely the outward marks of His creation. When we return to Him for trial, He will not judge us by skin color, race, height, appearance, or sexual orientation. These are not to be written in the book of life. "The dead were judged according to their deeds by what was written on the scrolls" (Revelation 20:12). On reflection, my initial panic and self-blame stemmed from a fear of being rejected, lack of self-identification, and the teachings of the Church put tremendous pressure on me, preventing me from knowing the salvation of Christ.

In the past fifteen years, God's love has never left my heart, whether I am passionate or disheartened. Even when I thought I was rejected by the Church, feeling like I was in the abyss of darkness, even when despair swallowed me up, God gave me a ray of light after my constant prayers. We are portraits of God. Among all of His creations, we were the only ones who received his breath of life (Genesis 2:7). From the beginning of creation, He has been willing to share His love with us. His love is in every corner of the world, and deep in everyone's soul. Although original sin makes us deficient in various ways, the incompleteness is filled by the love of the Son of Man.

Nowadays, I have laid down all my burdens, fully accepted my identity, and explained my homosexuality to my parish priests. Thank

God for letting me meet a disciple who upholds the teachings and spirit of His Son. He encourages me with love and kindness to continue getting close to Jesus Christ. My godchildren have also changed from doubting and rejecting me to gradually accepting my identity, since they have witnessed that I managed to maintain the original enthusiasm of my faith for more than 10 years. They have also witnessed the traces of God's love on me and realised that I had not strayed from faith. God did not abandon me. We finally reconciled. Maybe one day I will enter the seminary again, but that would be out of my own willingness to choose to live like eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven. It has nothing to do with others. This is the freedom that God has given me, and I will cherish it.

I also have a deeper understanding that faith is only about our own relationship with God. True faith shows when everyone thinks that you no longer believe in God, but you still firmly guard your faith. Even if the Church no longer recognises you as one of them, you still follow the guidance of the Gospel. Living in the present as if you have returned to the embrace of God. There are no mediators or bridges. We only need to face God on our own. It is a new kind of realisation of life and faith. It is the kind of light that shines through after experiencing complete darkness. It is a kind of awakening that is only possible after being resurrected in desperation. When we are no longer bound by the original troubles, we will realise that there are still many more meaningful things in our lives waiting for us to do. We do not need to be entangled in sinful thoughts every day. When you are sure of God's love, you can free yourself from bondage, wholeheartedly thank God for His great doings, and start practicing love in your life. Perhaps there are still many unsolved mysteries in the present life, but those are not important anymore. We only need to take His hand and walk with confidence, and we will surely walk into His new heaven and new earth.

I have more than 30 years of experience in faith and 15 years of desperation, pain and struggles. How many 15 year intervals are there in a life? I thank God for not giving up on me during these 15 years, and thank Him for giving me hope and comfort when I was in despair. Although I do not know why He made me like this, maybe He will tell me when I meet Him face to face. But this is no longer important. What

is important is the fact that I believe He loves me, and I love Him more. I used to sigh: how can there be a perfect solution in this world, one that fails neither Jesus nor my lover? Now in His love, I have already found the answer, because He said: "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never hunger, and whoever believes in me will never thirst... Everything the Father gives me will come to me, and I will not reject anyone who comes to me." (John 6:35, 37)

May God bless all LGBTQI+ brothers and sisters and may He also bless those who disregard or even oppose LGBTQI+ Christians. Amen!

A Gay Catholic Activist Fighting for LGBTQI+ Rights

Ling Xuan, Fuzhou

Editor's note: Ling Xuan is the founder of the well-known West Coast Common Heart LGBT League[1] in China. He and his mother are the conveners of the Fujian chapter of PFLAG China.[2] Their story may be familiar to many friends in the LGBTQI+ community.[3] Although Ling Xuan has briefly talked about his Catholic identity on some occasions, he has yet to share his experience in depth. We appreciate that he is willing to talk about this other part of his valuable life experience here.

I used to be like many other gay friends—as I had never heard about homosexuality, I was perplexed when I found myself being interested in other boys. I thought I was the only one like this in the whole world. I was born and raised in a large compound occupied by many households. My family was of a Daoist background, and two of my granduncles were Daoist priests. My grandmother was tonsured to become a consecrated Buddhist in her old age. Therefore, I had learned a lot about both

[1] West Coast Common Heart LGBT League (formerly the Rainbow Association of Fujian Normal University) was founded on November 6, 2006. It was formerly a registered society in the university. In December 2011, it was officially transformed into a private NGO as a youth group with a vision of promoting LGBTQI+ academic research and social welfare. It has been organising activities, striving to create a multicultural, equal, mutually inclusive and respectful society (cited from *Baidu Encyclopedia*).

[2] Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays China (PFLAG China) was established in 2008, providing support for LGBTQI+ groups and their friends and family in China. PFLAG China is an independent civil organisation that does not belong to any other organisation. Its official Weibo account is 同性恋亲友会.

[3] If you want to know their story, please see http://www.mnw.cn/news/fj/909402.html.

Buddhism and Daoism since childhood. When I grew up, because of my homosexuality, I read a lot of religious books, trying to learn about their understanding of and attitude towards homosexuality.

From the time I was young I have always liked to be alone. I did not have many friends. It was only on entering junior high school that I finally made a good female friend. She was very masculine. Her family had been Catholic for generations. In today's terms, they belonged to the underground church community. Her aunt was a nun. They operated the biggest supermarket in the town, and it was quite well-known locally. They bought a few floors of a commercial building and had them repurposed to be a church.

Although she was a lone wolf without many friends as well, we bonded like kindred spirits. I did not know anything about sexual orientation at that time, and it was she who introduced me to some Japanese homosexual-oriented manga, letting me know the concept of homosexuality. Everything I knew about sex was from her. In junior high school, many students started dating, calling their loved ones 'girlfriend' or 'boyfriend'. We were not really that keen on these titles. She told me that she liked girls, but she felt ashamed of her appearance.

She told her aunt about her sexual orientation. From that time, people in the Church began to pray for her and locked her up at home, trying to change her.

On the one hand I thought myself a monster, too, also seeking to change. On the other hand, the Catholic faith seemed vastly different from what I had learned about Buddhism and Daoism, and I became a catechumen out of curiosity.

It was a seminarian who taught us catechism. After a few months I shared my personal issues and worries with the seminarian. The response I received was that 'it is not right'. At the time, I also accepted that it was not right and it was not allowed. In the face of the disagreement with myself, this external confirmation afforded me a kind of relief.

I had entered puberty. My own disagreement and the Church's disapproval made me very much depressed. My friend felt the same as well. She really liked another girl in our class, and she had written some love letters to her. It was later discovered by the seminarian and she was locked up at home and did not come to the catechumen class for more

than a month. I looked for her at the church, but my requests to visit her were always rejected. After a month or so, she returned to school, but she was reluctant to talk to me about anything, whether it was the girl she liked or her sexual orientation. We still went to church together, and the seminarian no longer discussed similar issues with us, only focusing on the Catholic faith.

More than a month later she left a letter for me, telling me not to go to the church anymore, and that I would never see her again. I was terrified and could not sleep the entire night. The next day, rumours were already spreading around on campus: she had jumped off a building. When I returned home, I was too scared to face the fact. I could only pray.

When I first started going to church, the seminarian had told us that abortion and suicide were grave sins that would lead to hell. We must never do it. That was why I was confused—because I was not born in a Catholic family, I never understood what kind of painful experience would have driven her to end her own life. To this day, I still keep the letter she left me.

In the month after that, I did not dare to go to the church. But I kept praying, hoping that some kind of mysterious power could change my life. I wished to be consoled by God, hoping that He would talk to me personally. I was afraid of the Church, and I was afraid of all things related to sexual orientation. I became even more closed, and my schoolwork was a mess.

During that time, apart from my progress in spiritual life, my class teacher also helped me get back to life gradually. I liked him quite a lot. He thought that my friend and I were best friends and that her death must have affected me a great deal. He tried to console me, and I told him everything about myself. I thought that God was trying to lead me out of my sadness through my class teacher's consolation. That month was the saddest moment of my life, and also the moment when I prayed the most. Under the patient guidance of the class teacher, I gradually recovered, and my academic grades jumped to the top 10 of the class.

My best friend was baptised when she was young. But for me, the seminarian said I could not receive baptism as long as I was this kind of person who was always thinking about filthy things. That was why I had not been baptised for so many years. I insisted on reading the Bible and

religious books as well as praying on my own. I dared not get in touch with the Church.

Religion is a very private matter to me, and it has left me a deep wound, so I had never been in touch with any gay Christians before 2006, when I started taking part in LGBTQI+ social movements. In 2010, we organised an LGBTQI+ group conference in Fujian. During the conference, I met the Maji Group from Xiamen. They were a small community of LGBTQI+ Christians, but they were all Protestants.

From December 31, 2011 to January 3, 2012, I participated in a retreat for LGBTQI+ Christians in Xiamen. I met many positive LGBTQI+ Christians. There were no other Catholics. The format of the retreat was Protestant. I felt lonely. They were all really cheerful, good at expressing themselves, but I was very quiet.

I spent an entire night sharing with Pastor Ouyang Wenfeng my worries and doubts that had accumulated over the years. I asked him, is there a Catholic Church that accepts homosexuality? I long for recognition and a sense of belonging.

His answer was no. He has enlightened me much, but he also told me to return to my church. If I thought it fit, I could treat him like a priest and confess or talk to him. Hence, I shared a lot of my personal matters with him.

My mother joined us at the end of the retreat. She was moved as well.

After the retreat, I returned to Fuzhou and went to the nearest church from my home: Fuzhou Ximen Catholic Church. I told the priest that I wanted to be baptised. Yet even during confessions, especially the one before baptism, I did not tell the priest my true identity, because the wound went too deep. I felt torn. In the end, I was baptised, and my baptismal name was Ignatius.

After baptism, I still did not feel much sense of belonging to the Church. I also started to look for Catholics in various LGBTQI+ Christian fellowships. What made me happy was, starting in 2010, many LGBTQI+ Catholics had gathered together and began providing support for each other. But the fly in the ointment was that everyone was so far apart.

In the same year, I went to Beijing to participate in the National LGBT Movement Conference and encountered various kinds of

LGBTQI+ communities and organisations. I thought, since we already had LGBTQI+ Christian fellowships, why couldn't I see them being active in conferences like this? I went to the person in charge, Xiao Gang, and asked him if it was alright to invite some LGBTQI+ Christian fellowships. He said, "Of course." Because there were different groupings for different organisations, I went on to ask: "Which groupings should the LGBTQI+ Christian fellowships be placed in?" Xiao Gang replied, "the periphery of the periphery!"

Nowadays I can see many LGBTQI+ Christians joining together, supporting each other and witnessing for God. I am convinced that LGBTQI+ Catholics and Protestants can one day fully cooperate with each other and move towards communion.

In 2015, I participated in the National LGBT Christian Retreat held in Chengdu. A group of five or six gay Catholics, myself included, found each other. Apart from the retreat activities in the daytime, we also got up early in the morning and took part in the Mass in a church far away. At that moment, I was truly happy.

Perplexity on the Way of the Cross

Anqing, Chengdu

I was born in an ordinary family in Chengdu in 1982. My father worked in the public service and my mother worked in a state-owned factory. My parents had a harmonious relationship. From my early years, I was rarely sick or suffered any hardship. I was never beaten by my parents as far as I can remember. My family was neither rich nor poor, just doing fine. Growing up in this family, I was very clever since childhood. Because of my good grades, I was loved by the adults. I was admitted to a junior high school that ranked in the top three in the city and continued my senior high there as well.

The first turning point in my life was at the end of my first year at senior high school. At that time, I had to decide whether I wanted to study for an arts or a science career. I preferred arts, but my parents thought that learning something more technical was better. After two days of fighting with my family, I reluctantly surrendered, but my rebellious inner mind made me want to give up studying. I stopped doing any homework or studying, though I did attend classes reluctantly. In the rest of my senior high years, I read all the novels by Jin Yong, Gu Long, Liang Yusheng, Qiong Yao and Juan Xi, and I also got up in the middle of the night to play computer games. Naturally, my grades suffered. The results I got from a few mock exams in my third year were just around the requirements for entering a community college. At that time, I had already given up studying. I thought that I could make a living with my physical strength, like moving bricks on a construction site or something like that. Therefore, I let my father determine my desired majors. Unexpectedly, with a stable mental state, my college entrance examination results were surprisingly good. In the end, I was only 10 marks away from the cut-off score for key universities. I

was admitted to a communication engineering major in an ordinary university in Chengdu selected by my father.

The first half of my freshman year was the lowest point of my life. I did not understand anything related to the major courses except for Chinese language, English language and politics. I also did not want to read any books. I kept asking myself: what is the point in living? What will my future life be? But there was no answer. In that dark desperation, I had thought about death many times and thought that maybe it was a kind of relief! But since starting senior high school, I really liked the ideas proposed in the *Tao Te Ching*—the thought of being quiet, innocent and natural had deeply influenced me. When, in desperation, I constantly said to myself: I was born into this world naturally, so let me leave this world naturally as well. Even if life is boring and meaningless, I should still carry on! After the first semester of my freshman year, I made my last attempt to resist my parents' will. I went back to my parents and said that I wanted to repeat my third year of senior high school and retake the entrance examination in order to study liberal arts, but I was discouraged by my parents again. After graduating from the university, my mother arranged for me to work in the company owned by my uncle. I spent three years there, then resigned and rested for a year and a half, until the second and greatest turning point in my life.

Here I need to give you the context related to my love life and sexual experience. At the age of 14 or 15, I watched porn for the first time, and I seemed to pay the same amount of attention to both the men and women in those videos. When I was in high school, I also had a crush on one or two girls, but I was also very close to a few male classmates. Now I think I actually liked those male classmates. When I was in university, I slowly realised that my attention to men was much higher than to women when I was watching porn. At that time, the internet was quite common already. After doing some research online, I realised what homosexuality was, and then I started to visit websites with gay content. Because I had always been struggling in a dark and meaningless pit, coupled with a fatter appearance and low self-esteem, I had never had a relationship, nor any sexual contact with others until the end of 2007, when I resigned and returned home. I then joined a gay QQ chat group for the first time. Later, I also met an online friend for the first time. He

was my first boyfriend.

After breaking up with my first boyfriend in early 2009, I had neither work nor love life during that time. In the midst of pain, I made the same choice most others would make. I thought that I would simply find another boyfriend, so I started to join other gay QQ groups. Among the search results, a group named Chengdu Aibai LGBT Youth Center caught my attention. I found that they had a webpage and went to take a look. There was a free psychological counseling course offered by 'peer counsellors'. I thought it might be suitable for me, so I signed up. There I met H, my psychology teacher and the spiritual formation teacher. H was a heterosexual girl and a Catholic. She provided psychological counselling services to LGBTQI+ people at the Youth Center. This was also the beginning of my path to the Catholic faith.

Sichuan has always been a comfortable place to live in, with a variety of good local products, but such a place is also a desert for faith and spirituality. None of the relatives and friends I knew had any true faith. A few of them were only burning incense and acting as if they were worshipping Buddha. The education I received didn't encourage any religious beliefs. When I entered a temple, I did not burn incense or worship the Buddha statue. I did not think that the clay statue was anything superior. I did believe that there was a higher power in this universe, but I did not think it had any relation with people's lives. After university, the pain in my soul had made me shut down my feelings. From then on, I lived by my rationality: I could feel neither joy nor sorrow. Everyone commented on me with the same word: 'calm'. At that time, in my eyes, everything could be deconstructed by my rationality. Even if my parents died in front of me, I probably would not feel sad. I would say with rationality: this is a natural phenomenon, there's no need to be sad. I did not seem to experience pain at the time, but ultimately, I was just like a zombie.

After meeting H at the end of February 2009, I began to attend her classes. She said that we needed to return to the root of our feelings and the experience of life. All truths were there. I did not understand these words, and I did not agree either. I tried to argue with H, but she did not argue back. Very strangely, even though I thought she was not correct, I had some kind of trust in her that made me willing to listen. Now

thinking back, I suppose I can summarise it with a sentence: "The people who sit in darkness have seen a great light, on those dwelling in a land overshadowed by death, light has arisen." (Matthew 4:16). The longer I got to know H, the more I realised what she said was true, and my past beliefs became problematic. I originally thought that I was a wise person, and I knew everything in the world, but later I realised that H was much better than me. One day in April 2010, I was talking to H. I asked her: "Where is your wisdom coming from?" She replied: "The revelation that God gave me when I prayed the Rosary." She never preached to us or talked about the Gospel, but her words moved me. I said to myself: Is this something magical? Then let me try! From then on, I began to pray the Rosary every day basically without any exception until today (there were two months in the past 11 years when I wanted to stop praying the Rosary, and realised that I would sink to a low point if I did not pray).

After I started to pray the Rosary, I gradually experienced something completely different from the past. Slowly I felt the existence of God. Many values I held onto, that had been built up in the previous 20 years, completely collapsed. In August 2010, I began to take catechism classes in the parish and learned more about Catholic teachings. Before that, my homosexual identity was not a problem. I viewed homosexuality through the lens of science and liberalism, so I did not think that homosexuality was a problem at all. But after I started to learn Catholic teachings, I discovered that the Church view of homosexuality was very different from the secular. I wanted to get baptised at that time but the teachings of the Church made me hesitate. Later I asked H. After I explained my confusion, H said to me, "You don't have to worry about what the Church says for now. If you feel that God loves you, then you can be baptised. If you think that God does not love you, then treat it like nothing has ever happened." I knew that God loved me, so I had a new life starting on December 19, 2010.

I have to mention a small episode here. This was the first time that I believed I had a relationship with God. It may be very insignificant in the eyes of others, but to me, a person with little faith, it was a great grace blessed by God.

One night before the baptism in December 2010, I returned to my rented flat from my parents' home. I was on the bus and a gay friend who

was living quite close phoned me. He told me that his cat had been sick for a dozen days and the medical treatment did not seem to be effective. He wanted me to accompany him when he took his cat to be euthanised. Because of my personality, I tended to do things that pleased others, so I immediately agreed. But after hanging up, I suddenly thought, "Isn't the Church against euthanasia? Is it really appropriate to do so?" Then I thought to myself again, "It's just a cat, not a human. So it doesn't matter." These two thoughts were fighting in my brain and even after getting off the bus, I still could not find an answer on the way to my friend's home. At that moment, I remembered that some members of the church told me to seek God's advice when there was confusion. So I tried to pray and told God that I didn't know what to do and asked him to enlighten me. In less than a minute after the prayer, I had a sharp pain in my right foot, and I could not move it, as if the bone was broken. I immediately realised that this was God's response to me. I prayed again and told God that I understood and thanked Him for His enlightenment. After two or three minutes, my foot stopped hurting. I called the friend and asked him to take good care of the cat and let it die naturally. This incident has influenced me so deeply, but I have rarely mentioned it before. I believe that God has His proper arrangements for every life.

After receiving baptism in December 2010, I had two romantic relationships that lasted around three months in early 2011 and early 2012 respectively. During those two relationships, I fully realised the emptiness of my soul. And I knew very well that the emptiness could only be filled by God.

After the failed relationship in 2012, I reflected constantly on myself, starting to doubt my homosexual identity. Then I went to H again for advice, and her answer to me was, "You only need to focus on your spiritual formation and getting closer to God. God will naturally help you solve all your problems." After listening to this, I began to seek answers and solutions in the Church. According to the teachings of the Church, homosexuals seem to have only two paths available: one is to become heterosexual, and the other is celibacy. Since then I have been struggling between these two paths.

In early 2013, I decided to stop masturbation for three months. But it failed in the end. This failed effort made me realise that my sexual

energy could not be suppressed. The stronger the pressure, the fiercer the rebound would be. Then I had my first one-night stand. It made me realise that God's commandments were indeed meant to protect us and care for us. The person I had a one-night stand with was not really the type I like. But in those two or three weeks after that night, I would still uncontrollably think about him. At that time, I realised that sexual contact not only involved physical connection, but also spiritual connection. Sexual disorders can harm our souls. However, until now, I still do not know how to transform sexual energy. Is it only the clergy who have this blessing of being able to transform such energy?

In the second half of 2013, our group studied together and practised the 'spiritual prayer' mentioned in the book *The Spiritual Healer Walking with God* written by Fr Wang Jing-hong, a Jesuit priest in Taiwan. When I was praying, I recovered from a trauma that was deeply rooted in my childhood. After the wound had been healed, I dreamed for several nights consecutively. I dreamed that I had sexual intercourse with a woman. At that time, I realised that my sexual energy towards women was activated. In the past, I had had no sexual urge for women, but then it was there. This situation gave me a lot of encouragement. I thought that I could become heterosexual, or at least bisexual. After that, I was praying, hoping to change more quickly. But maybe because those prayers came out of my rationality instead of my spirituality, the change was not significant. Not to mention that in 2014, I was focusing a lot on my work. Nine out of ten people whom I was attracted to were still male.

At the beginning of 2015, my inner desire for intimacy and my longing for 'conformity with the sacredness of God' made me pray even harder. I hoped that I could resist my attraction to a young man that I had known for a few years, so that I could start having affection for the opposite sex. But the result was far beyond my expectation. I did stop being attracted to that person, but I started having feelings for a Protestant young man whom I got to know at the beginning of the year. This realisation made me feel very puzzled and surprised, which further caused me a lot of anxiety and fear.

In those two days, I kept asking God: "What is the meaning of your arrangement?" But God did not answer me. This time, unlike previously, the voice in my head (the discipline of the Church) did not hold back my

inner desire for that person. I wanted to develop a deeper relationship with him. Those two days were really tormenting. I could not stop thinking about whether this was in accordance with the will of God, and whether I would go to hell for this in the afterlife. At that time, I saw how vulnerable my faith in God was. I did not believe that He loved me unconditionally, and I did not believe that He could save me from evil. At that time, I finally realised how strong my fear was.

After seeing the connection between the operation of the rational mind and the fear, my mind slowed down for a little bit. It was then I realised the meaning of the 'struggle between the mind and the heart'. This time the voice in my heart was much louder than ever before, so I decided to follow my heart and not to think about the future, just living in the present. The moment I made this decision, I found peace. I also realised that God would not stop loving me because of the kind of person I was or what I did. Nothing can separate me from the love of the Lord.

In July 2015, I began dating a Protestant man. Now we are cohabitating. In the past six months, a lot of things have happened. I have no choice but to rely on God to move forward. I often think that if I was a Protestant, it would be so much simpler. I could interpret the Bible according to the understanding of the LGBTQI+ Church. But now I can only pray and hope that God will guide me on this Way of the Cross. I believe that He will eventually lead me to a resting place!

Since I was baptised, my life has turned upside down, from acting like a zombie to beginning to feel how rich and wonderful life is. I had no real interpersonal relationship before, and now I have more and more brothers and sisters who love me. Although there is still a lot of pain each day, with God's guidance, I can carry my own cross.

My story is not over, and God's love for us will never end. May the peace of the Lord always be with us, Amen!

Let Me Go, Hold Me Tight

Lao Yao, Fujian

I was born in the 1970s in a family with six siblings. I am the youngest of them all. My mother passed away before I was two years old. I have been longing for maternal love for as long as I can remember. The most memorable thing was that I rarely went out to play when I was a child because our cousins, who have their mothers, would bully us since we lost ours. My grandmother became very protective of us and did not let us talk to others. Most of the time, I stayed at home and could not play with other children. To this day, losing my mother is something that I still cannot get over.

When I was 13 or 14, I had a vague feeling that I was attracted to handsome males who were older than me. I enjoyed talking to them a lot, but I did not know that it was homosexuality. When I reached 17 or 18, I had a crush on a girl, who was a friend of my cousin. We often went out to watch movies and chat. But her parents knew that my family was quite poor, so they tried to stop us from being together. Once I bought a gold ring for her birthday, but she dared not accept it. I felt inferior and depressed, and I dared not fight back against her parents. Gradually, we stopped contacting each other.

I was the only Catholic in my family. I started to go to church at the age of 12 or 13. I was such a small child but I believe that God chose me to get to know Him. I love the Virgin Mary and I am thankful to her. Because of the lack of maternal love, I especially rely on the Virgin Mary. But my relatives and friends do not have religious faith. They thought that others would reproach me if I am Catholic. At first, I tried to explain to them. Later on, I just became accustomed to it and stopped arguing with them. When I started working, as there were few churches around and I was tied up, I often had to take days off to attend Mass in different areas.

When I became more mature, I realised I am gay. I often went to a park in the city, where LGBTQI+ people often met each other. I would go there and observe. In fact, in my eyes, there was not much conflict between my faith and homosexuality.

For a long time after my first love failed, I did not date anyone again. Therefore, I prayed to God and the Virgin Mary to give me strength. At that time, I wanted to serve the church. I spent five or six years discerning my vocation, but the local sister (nun) could not provide any more help to me. I then contacted priests in other parishes. And I joined the class of 1996 for the priesthood of the diocese. There were three levels of classes. Because I was not highly educated, they put me in the low-level class. However, at the time, the diocese allocated more resources to train the high and mid-level classes. The low-level class did not progress much, and the class even stopped after a few months. We went back to our own localities. Some followed their priests, and some continued their vocational discernment at home. At that time, the diocese gave us a living allowance of 450 yuan a quarter. I chose to continue my discernment at home. I went to confession and told the priest about this. The priest said, "If you can't take it anymore, then leave." And so, I chose to leave.

Around Christmas 1998, I sneaked over to Japan and lived there for a few years. During those years in Japan, I prayed to the Virgin Mary, hoping that she could bless me with a better life. In Japan, society is much more open than in China. I developed a deeper understanding of the LGBTQI+ community. I also often hung out in gay clubs and bars. In October of my sixth year in Japan, I met a Chinese girl in the church and planned to marry her. We were scheduled to register our marriage together after a Sunday Mass, but I was arrested by the police because I was an illegal immigrant. After me staying in the prison for half a year, she was also arrested for illegal immigration. After which we both returned to China, and we continued to prepare for our marriage. However, one month after, she suddenly broke up with me. I supposed she thought that I was not doing well financially. Maybe it was her relatives' advice. In short, we were not meant to be together.

After breaking with her, I met my current wife who was introduced by a friend of mine. We celebrated the sacrament of matrimony and gave

birth to a boy and a girl. Thanks be to God. I am very grateful for my present life.

Last year, the parish held a retreat and there was a foreign priest. I told him that I was bisexual. He comforted me and told me that I should seek a priest who is close to me and ask him to be my spiritual director to accompany me in my life. Of course, I was still attracted by the LGBTQI+ community, and occasionally hang out with them.

I work in Shanghai, so my wife and children are not around me. In a typical year, I can only go back on holiday for half a month while my wife and children will come over for summer and winter vacations. I will bring them to visit various places. I have been thinking, if anything happens to my current job, I will go back to my hometown and be with my family. Looking back on my life, throughout more than 40 years, my homosexuality has always been a secret. I am very grateful to the priests I met in fellowships. Their accompaniment helps me understand how to live my faith life. I dedicate my family to God and the Virgin Mary and am thankful to them.

Lost, and Found the True Light

Ai Tai, Henan

Time in my hometown (1986-2004)

I was born in a remote rural village of Henan Province. My family had about one hectare of farmland. My ancestors were all poor farmers. My father liked to drink, and when he got drunk, he yelled at people and hit them. But he was very hardworking. My mother was a very cheerful and optimistic rural woman. She was a primary school teacher, not in a state-owned school, but in a small private one. I do not remember what year it was when several women in our village started going to the church in town and having faith in Jesus. They also brought back an icon of Jesus. My mother was one of the earliest Christians in our village. A woman in our village used her own home as the church in our village. Then we had our own church and it was led by the county's Three-Self Patriotic Church. The church was so lively that every Sunday it was crowded with people. There were many icons on the walls inside the church. We prayed to the icons on our knees. I suppose many Christian brothers and sisters will be confused by this: you probably want to ask me, "Hey brother, weren't you all Protestant? How did you still have icons in the church? Isn't Protestant teaching against icons?" Brothers and sisters, please listen to me. There were indeed icons in my rural church. It might be that when Christianity was first preached in the rural areas, that made it easier for people to accept, and it could also let people have a better sense of the image of God.

I have known since childhood that I am a child of Christ. However, I am not sure who influenced my mother, telling her that she could make a fortune if she worshipped the Buddha, thus making her convert to Buddhism and no longer believe in God. On the other hand, my

grandmother walked into the church after my grandfather passed away at the age of only 49. It was too much grief for her to bear, and my grandmother started believing in Jesus. So in my hometown, people always felt that those who believed in Jesus seemed to either get sick themselves or have some tragedies at home.

I continued to follow God, and our family life went on as usual. When I was 14 years old, I went to a junior high school 60 miles away from home and only came back home every two weeks. When I came back, I always stayed with my grandmother and listened to what she had heard during the week. One Friday night, she spoke of the testimony of a believer: she dreamed of entering heaven and seeing Jesus. The heaven was so perfect, and it gave her great confidence, "Believe it! There really is a heaven!" Just before dawn, I had a dream of the Virgin Mary and two angels coming down from heaven. The Virgin Mary was in the middle, accompanied by an angel on each side. She gave me a scroll, and I accepted it, kneeling on my knees. I did not have time to open it before I woke up. They were all gone. After waking up, I kneeled down in front of the icon of Jesus on the wall and reached out to him. Nothing happened. My grandmother was cooking when I told her about my dream of the Virgin Mary. My grandma was really happy and said that I was blessed. I was also very surprised that unlike others who usually dreamed of Jesus, I did not dream of him. Now I realise that the Virgin Mary who was in my dream was the image of the Immaculate Heart of Mary from the way she was dressed. I had never seen her in such an image in my hometown. The icons of the Virgin Mary on the wall usually showed her dressed in white or like a nun. I first saw the image of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in my dream.

A long lost decade (2004-2014)

Later, I stopped going to school and went to work in Guangdong. I kept the Bible with me at all times, and wore a cross pendant on a chain. When I first arrived in Guangdong, I worked as a waiter at a Western restaurant in a five-star hotel. I used my connections to get this job. Otherwise, I would not have got this job because I looked so rustic and my Mandarin was poor. I found that this was ultimately a capitalist

society, vastly different from my hometown. The rich people were on the top, while we poor people were working for them, or even serving them.

I was 18 years old at that time. As a grown male, I naturally had physical needs. But I wondered why the object of my sexual fantasy was not female. Why was I attracted to handsome men? Why did I feel jealous of the pretty women because they were cared for by men? A colleague in Shenzhen told me that I looked like a *tongzhi*, just like Leslie Cheung. Another Lithuanian chef said to me that I was a *boli* (literally 'crystal' or 'glass', also referring to homosexuals). I went to an internet cafe to search for the meanings of *tongzhi* and *boli*.

After learning what the terms meant, I was frightened and glad at the same time. I was frightened because of the many verses against homosexuality in the Bible.[1] I was afraid to death. At the same time, I was glad because there were so many others like me. I had found my group, and I was not the only one. But I dared not to meet them, so I only stuck to online audio chat. There was a chat room service called Bliao, and there was an LGBTQI+ chat room.

Whenever I fantasised about a man, I would recall the words in the Bible: "Males did shameful things with males and thus received in their own persons the due penalty for their perversity." But when I could not help it, I started touching myself. Every time I did so, I felt guilty about it. From 2004 to 2006, I spent most of my time fantasising about men.

I was baptised in July 2006 and became a real Christian. In that year, I also lost my virginity. I had my first experience with a guy who was two years younger than me. He was a salesman for a soft drink company. After the deed, I felt both satisfied and desolate. I was satisfied because I finally knew how it felt. I was desolate because I thought I was going to hell for my homosexuality. I would not be able to enter

[1] *Editor's note*: Today's exegetical scholars generally acknowledge that the sexual relationship among men described in the Bible was in the practice of paganism, or that heterosexuals violated their nature due to seeking power or other reasons. They were of different nature from the academic definition of homosexuality since the 19th century. Therefore, the critique of sexual behaviours among men in the Bible cannot be applied to the homosexual love in today's society. However, the traditional teachings of the Church have caused many homosexuals to suffer psychologically and to fail at building self-recognition. They need to be properly preached and counselled.

heaven anymore. I was doomed to go to hell. I had loved God for so many years, and I had been laughed at by so many classmates in the past. I thought I could enter heaven when I died, but this would never happen if I slept with a man. I thought I was going to die, but I did not. Maybe God has abandoned me, I thought. Indulge yourself! I sometimes regretted my actions, but also sometimes indulged in my desires. It was like self-torture. The world of temptations had eroded my mind, while the advice from my brethren comforted me. When I attended church on Sundays, I appeared to love God so much, and I was such a faithful Christian. At night or on vacation, I became a dissolute homosexual. I returned to Henan in 2010 and prayed in the church of the Three-self Patriotic Church. At that time, I did not think much about it. I just wanted a stable life. Same-sex marriage was already legalised in some foreign countries and I thought China could be the next. I prayed to the Lord shamelessly, "My Lord, please bless me to find a boyfriend that I can stay with for the rest of my life!" The Lord really listened to my prayers. He really gave me one. I never thought that I could meet such a good man. I have been with him ever since, but I did not dare to go often to church, because the other Christians there would ask me why I was still not married. I avoided gatherings and I was frightened that they might learn that I lived with a man. But I still wanted to go to church, so I only went there every few months, usually when it was the time of Holy Communion because I still desired to be fed by the Lord Jesus. My LGBTQI+ friends envied me and said that I was lucky to have found such a good partner. I said he was the Lord's gift and they thought I was crazy.

Lord Jesus Christ, do I always have to avoid the problem?

Encountering the true light (2014-present)

I met a gay Catholic from Taiwan in an LGBTQI+ Christian group in 2014. He opened another door for me. He said that God blessed homosexuals, Jesus loved them, and the Blessed Mother kept them safe as well. Lord Jesus, was this true? Even people who were not religious dared not say anything regarding homosexuality. But he told me that God would protect homosexuals. He invited me to get to know the

LGBTQI+ people in the Catholic Church. He said that the Catholic Church was the most gentle and tolerant church for LGBTQI+ people. This brother was very enthusiastic and often told me about the changes that Jesus and the Blessed Mother had brought to him and hoped that I could experience the changes as well. "Mother Mary!" My heart could not help but tremble, "Mother Mary, how much your child needs you! I didn't know enough before. I didn't know how to get close to you." Other brothers and sisters had told me that Mother Mary was merely the biological mother of Jesus, that she had not ascended into heaven after she died. I believed it at that time. "Mother Mary, I am so sorry. Do you know that I am a homosexual? You must know that your child is not worthy of asking anything from the Lord Jesus. Please, I need your intercession. The brethren of the Catholic Church let me join a Rosary QQ chat group. Every night I pray the Rosary with my brethren, and my spirituality has been improved. Immaculate Heart of Mary, please pray for me!"

When my father was building a house for someone in April 2015, he fell down and became disabled. I think that Jesus Christ, giving us such a huge challenge, meant to let us realise that He was the only Saviour, but what was I to do? When I prayed the Rosary with my brethren every night, I told them about my own problems. There was a Brother Liu in the group who was praying for my father every night. I myself cannot even pray for my father every night, but Brother Liu persists.

I love God and I love the Church that He built upon the rock. I love the Immaculate Heart of Mother Mary. I am eager to change and become a true believer in the Catholic Church. I am going to do good deeds. I am willing to fight for the Lord. I am willing to be an evangelist and am willing to serve LGBTQI+ Christians. I have only known the Catholic Church for just a few months, and I still have a lot to learn. In the past, I dared not face my homosexuality directly. Every time I had sex with my partner, I thought to myself that was the last time. I felt so guilty about it that I would have nothing to say to defend myself even if I died. Lord, please raise me up and let me make up for what I owe you before I die.

My grandmother returned to God several years ago. I dreamed of her almost every day in the first year after her death, dreaming of the moment when she died. I prayed to the Lord, asking the Lord not to let

me dream of her again, but I was still dreaming of her. November is the Month of the Holy Souls, and we should be praying for the deceased. I did not know that there was such a concept as purgatory, so I persisted in following the brethren to pray for the spirits in purgatory. I hoped that my grandmother would be brought away by Mother Mary and placed in the arms of the Lord Jesus. Even more gratifying was that my mother started believing in God again. After so many things happening in my family, after encountering so many challenges and tests, my family finally knows that there is a true God.

After a period of studying in the catechism class, I was baptised on Mother's Day 2016 (it was also Ascension Day). I love my own mother, as well as my mother in heaven. Since childhood, I have often been told that I looked like my mother. Some people I know like to crack jokes about seeing a maternal side to me. It does not matter if others are saying good things or bad things about me: I think that men with a maternal side are better suited to be in a relationship, because they are considerate and caring. Someone asked me, "Is Catholicism any different from Protestantism? Don't you worship the same God?" However, God built His Church through Peter. Only the Church that was passed down from the apostles is where we should go! The joy in my heart cannot be expressed in words. Hopefully, I can follow the example of Mother Mary and follow only the Lord's arrangements and callings.

Brothers and sisters, God is righteous and just. He created the sun so that it shines on both the good and the bad. Because our Lord Jesus is full of compassion and mercy, those who follow him must have a rich life.

Lord, I pray to you, please help our father stand up soon. Please heal him with your almighty hands and guide our family to you. Let our family be chosen by you, and let our family be living in Christ, showing the glory of Christ. Amen!

Follow the Light

Shi Ge, Shanghai

Prologue

The wind was indeed fierce, and the rain kept pouring down. Holding the umbrella in my hand, I walked towards the river. Gazing at the boats coming and going on the river, I felt like I was one of those dilapidated boats—I have struggled through storms and dangerous shoals, but where was my dock? Where was the harbour that would shelter me from tempests?

I kept wiping my tears, but my heart was filled with joy. Lord, I understood that this was your will, and I was willing to follow it. I took out my small wallet, bringing out my beloved ring with a shaking hand. The ring was engraved with our names, both his and mine. I held it tightly in the palm of my hand, feeling despair in my heart. I walked forward. With a bitter taste in my mouth, I told myself that in God, nothing was beyond repair. Everything would be fine eventually.

I stood on an old bridge, kissing the shiny ring with tears in my eyes. Lord, I am willing to follow your will. Please bless them and bless me as well. Amen!

I closed my eyes, raised my hand and threw the ring into the river. *Splash!* Everything ended at that moment.

Heart-breaking love

I have known B for almost two years. We met on Weibo and grew to like each other because we shared the same faith. Soon, we started dating each other.

Before dating him, I had another boyfriend, but he went abroad to study in Paris. When he told me he was leaving, I was really upset. But

I still bid him farewell with a smile on my face—after all, I did not want to hinder his bright future. Before he left, we promised each other that even though we had to break up, we would still be friends.

I thought I would be with B for the rest of my life, and I firmly believed so. In those two years, we visited many places together, experienced many things together. I thought we understood each other. Although we had quarrels occasionally, we still had a lot of enjoyment together. I thought these were all a part of a flavourful life.

We met every Sunday afternoon. In the morning, we served in our respective parishes. I was a member of the choir in H city, so I still needed to rehearse after Mass, basically until 1pm. He usually finished his lunch by then, so we would go out together, taking a stroll, watching a movie.

His income was not particularly high, so I hoped to compensate his daily expenses with my own salary. I did not want to spend his money, so most of the time, I would pay for our expenses such as meals and movie tickets. I did not care too much about money, as long as we had enough to live by. I just wanted him to be happy, giving him a warm home to return to, till death would separate us. He said he felt the same.

There was a time when an extremist in the church exposed my sexuality on Weibo. I was really upset, so I deleted my Weibo account and all my friends on the list, including him. I shut myself away from everyone. At that time, my parents often argued over nothing, to a point where they would threaten a divorce, thus making me further keep everything to myself. I had no passion or confidence in doing anything. Despite the understanding from the church's choir leader, that he did not blame me for the negative impact I brought on the church, I still felt ashamed.

That period lasted a long while. I built a wall around myself, and I was scared of doing anything. I even treated B coldly, because I feared others would hurt him because of me. However, because of it, he thought I no longer loved him. He lost faith in me. This year, on the eve of the Feast of Saint Joseph, I heard from a close female friend that he had fallen in love with another person he met online. I was shocked and in pain.

I told him that I really wanted to be with him, and I asked him to tell me directly if he had grown tired of me.

He replied that he once felt the same, but he had been left feeling disappointed for too long. His love for me had slowly died away. He got used to not having me around, and that gave him so much time to think about what he wanted for his own future. He gradually realised that he did not need me anymore. He could sleep without hearing from me. He could go for a walk without holding my hand... His care for me slowly changed, from the care for a lover, to the care for a good friend. Just a special good friend.

I thought about it for a while, then I replied: "When I was off from work, you were either busy and not taking my calls, or you had already returned home. At night, you always told me that you needed to stay with your mother, and on some days, you said you had classes to take. How could I possibly get in touch with you? All I could do was wait, and the only thing I got was a 'Good night' message."

He said: "This only happened recently. In fact, you used to call me a lot in the past, and I often could not take calls at home. Normally I could have already arrived home at 5.15 pm, but I preferred to stay out until 6 pm or 7 pm, even during rainy or stormy days, just to be able to talk to you. You did not know, and did not even ask, what I could or could not eat. I was willing to eat things you gave me, even if I could not take them. You were busy all the time. I did get worried, but I had been understanding. You often forgot to reply to my texts and messages. There were a lot of things you did not let me do: calling your name in front of others, spending too much time with other people, staring too much at you when we were out, holding your hand, etc. I tried so hard to meet all these demands. Whenever something happened to you, I got extremely concerned... I was so stressed and exhausted but I got accustomed to it." He then used an analogy to describe our relationship: he poured me a glass of hot water, but my heart was set on other beverages, so I just put the hot water aside. Other beverages might be delicious, but they did not relieve my thirst, so I remembered the hot water he gave me. I thought it was still hot, but it had turned cold. It was heart-warming at first, but my apathy let it cool down. He said he knew I was a kind person, and the analogy might not fit very well, but it did make some sense. He did not mean to point a finger at me or anything. It was simply an analogy.

I knew he was right. I did not pay much attention to him in those

days. I was hoping that we could live a life of chastity together, without too much lust involved. After the Weibo incident, I learned to stay low-key. I could no longer walk around People's Square or Nanjing Road Walkway holding his hand. I was terrified, and I wanted to protect him. He was in poor health. It was my fault that I didn't know what he could eat and what he couldn't. I always thought only hotpots and lamb were not suitable, but there were actually other things. He never told me, and I blamed myself for not knowing how to cherish and understand him. In the past when we were out, he would keep his eyes on me. I told him more than once that I was too shy and traditional to be comfortable about it: our feelings should just stay between us, and I didn't want others to know too much about us. After all, people would gossip and we would get a bad name. After reading his messages, I felt like I was stabbed right in the heart. I replied with tears in my eyes: "I understand what you mean."

It happened to be the Feast of St Joseph. After work, I went to Mass at the Holy Angel Church. With tears flowing down my cheeks, I told God everything and asked, what I should do?

From that day onwards, I called him every day, hoping that he would return to me. Sometimes he did not answer my calls, and sometimes he would say a few words impatiently, wanting to be done with me.

I was so silly that I even rushed to his house after work, staying downstairs outside in the wind, just to accompany him for his revision of the legal examination. It was chilly at night, and I caught a cold. But I just wanted to stay with him, although he clearly did not want that. I wanted to make up for what I'd done before. I was willing to do anything for him, even die for him. I waited until 10 pm, just before his shower, that was when I finally dared to give him a call, talked to him for a bit, then took the last train home.

On April 10, he lied to me saying that he was out travelling with his parents, but in fact he went to see the other man. I had been having doubts the whole afternoon, feeling frustrated and anxious. After work, I went to his home with a close female friend. I pressed the doorbell, and I heard his mother answering. I was utterly disappointed, and told her that I had gone to the wrong door. I felt like my heart was pierced by a sharp knife. No matter how my female friend tried to comfort me, I just

couldn't respond to her words but cried and cried.

What was the point of living? He didn't want me anymore.

When I reached home, I took out the sleeping pills my family got from various visits to the hospital. There might have been other medicine mixed in there, but I couldn't care less. I just wanted everything to end. In the face of imminent death, I was not afraid at all. I washed and dressed, putting on my favourite pyjamas, then I took the pills, swallowing one after another.

Thank you for the love you had given me. I wanted to go back to two years earlier, when you were still kind and gentle to me.

After about five minutes, I had taken all the pills. I left a final message on my QQ Zone and WeChat Moments:

"Took X sleeping pills. I don't want to wake up anymore. I want to transcend time and return to two years ago, when our love just started."

This message was only visible to two people: to him and my ex-boyfriend. Others wouldn't be able to view it, and I wanted it that way. After using the bathroom, I lay down quietly, saying goodbye to the stuffed toys next to my bed. I wanted to relive my life two years ago, when I still had him, when we had the happiest time together. That was when I first went to church, and he guided me, taught me. It was a fulfilling life, but it all came to an end. Every day I could only live in memories and pain. It was too unbearable for me, and that's why I wanted it to end.

Turning off the lights, I slowly fell asleep.

Farewell, world. Farewell, my dear.

I dreamed of the time when I was a child, living a carefree life, full of laughter and happiness... Then it was the scene when I was praying in the church after I grew up, listening to the choir singing chants to the Virgin Mary... It felt like everything went back to when they just started...

Then it was me talking to myself:

When I woke up in the morning,
The breeze was caressing the curtains decorated with white lace,
The alarm clock sounded at 7 am sharp.
'You're gonna be late if you don't get up now!'
My mother yelled at me.
I replied in a daze,

'Let me sleep for three more minutes...'
Just like always, I was late.
The teacher gave me a time-out in the corridor.
I failed the exams.
On my way back home after school,
I had some pancakes with my classmates.
I stared at the banquet gown behind the store windows.
These little things
Make me really happy.
I want...
I want to return to this normal life.
I want to go back...

I heard another type of music ringing in my ears. It was familiar, and it repeated over and over again. I was annoyed, couldn't go to sleep. "So troublesome! Who's that? Can't I just sleep?" I sat up all of a sudden, realising I was wide awake.

It was a call from France. I took the call, and before I could say anything, the person on the other side had started scolding me. It was my ex-boyfriend. I could not say anything but cry. After he calmed down, he told me how worried he was. He's been calling for an hour, and even skipped his class. He said, "Was he worth dying for?" What about me? What about my parents?

My parents—he reminded me of my parents. I didn't even say farewell properly to them, not even leaving a note for them. I was getting more and more upset, tears kept flowing down my face.

My ex-boyfriend kept comforting me and asked me not to do anything stupid again. He said he was still waiting to travel with me. I promised him that I would never do it again. He told me to call him if I needed anything: he was always there to listen.

When I hung up the phone, my stomach felt uncomfortable. I ran into the toilet and started vomiting, but it didn't alleviate the discomfort.

Perhaps subconsciously, I still wanted to live. That's why I had resisted the pills, causing them to be ineffective on me. Why did I wake up, and not go back to two years ago?

Maybe it was God's plan. Even in death, I didn't think about God. I was not worthy of His grace. I forgot that humans only have the right

to live their life to its fullest, but not the right to terminate it. I suddenly recalled what Mother Teresa said, "People are sad because they reject Jesus."

I sat on the toilet and cried alone. When I got exhausted, a voice suddenly rang out in my head: "Obey God!"

Lord, please forgive me, forgive my ignorant behaviour, and from now on, I will listen to you and obey you. Please fill me with your Holy Spirit. I have died once, and I live again!

My ex-boyfriend and I did go travelling in Europe together, but it was our final break-up trip. Every day during the trip, I thanked God for letting us meet each other. I knew there wasn't a future for us together, but I still prayed to God that he would forgive us and bless him with good health and a smooth life.

In the prayer room in the Vatican, I cried and talked to God: "Lord, I am willing to listen to you. I place my hope in you. Please act according to your will! At the same time, Lord, please bless everyone around me with good health as well."

However, I never understood: Did my detachment give you the right to date another man?

God is kind and just. One day, He will decide if it was just. I chose to forgive you. From now on, I will live on my own.

Seeking the light

After breaking up, relying on the power God gave me, I gradually returned to a calm and normal life.

But every day, I still mumbled his name in my heart again and again, even more often than the name of God. I wanted to know where he was, what he was doing, who he was staying together with. But I tried to correct my thoughts: we have broken up. I shouldn't care anymore.

After breaking up, whenever I thought of him, I would find a quiet corner to be alone, wiping the tears off my face and kissing the Rosary around my neck—it was a gift from him. I found myself struggling to concentrate on praying the Rosary.

In the beginning, I often forgot the words of the Rosary, then I slowly lost focus, with memories of him flooding my mind. I gritted my teeth,

with tears in my eyes, and recited the entire Rosary. Afterwards, I cried and prayed for forgiveness from Mother Mary.

When it was dark and quiet, I would bite at my quilt and stare at the moon, hoping that he would come back to me.

But he never did.

My close female friend told me that I'd changed: there was a mask on my face. I smiled and replied, "Not really, I have overcome it. I am happy now."

But I hadn't. I rejected all social life and shut myself away in a room, remembering everything that had happened in the past. I even forgot to pray the Rosary. Everything felt too tiresome to me. I just wanted to be alone.

I went to church every Sunday, but I couldn't feel the presence of God. I felt like I was just ticking a checkbox. I joined the choir for three years. The conductor only cared that I sang well, not about my faith. Even those unbaptised could join the choir if they sang very well. Maybe I was not good enough, or was it my sexual orientation, I was no longer suitable for singing among the cantors. So I was transferred to managing the audio devices. Every Sunday morning, I went to the church before 8.30 am, set up the microphones and adjusted each one's volume output. During the Mass, I sat separately from the choir. I sat on the side, doing what the conductor told me to do, adjusting mechanically the sound knobs to the desired level. Apart from the *Missa* and the Lord's Prayer, I didn't sing any other sacred music. I thought it didn't matter what they assigned me to do, I would do my best, because it didn't matter how insignificant my job was: it was still to give glory to the Lord. I thought about giving up, turning myself into an ordinary layman, taking part in the Mass downstairs. So far, I still struggle with whether I should continue this path.

After the Mass, I kneeled on the pew and prayed to God, and I often cried in the middle of my prayer. I was upset. I was suffering. I felt so wronged and pained. God, did you know that? Why couldn't I feel you anymore? Have you forsaken me?

To feel the presence of God, I began to participate in the anticipated Sunday Mass on Saturday evening: the English Mass at 5 pm and the Chinese Mass at 6.30 pm. I still attended the usual 9 am Sunday Mass

the following morning. In other words, I took part in three Masses every week. But I couldn't feel anything.

I didn't know why it was like this. Was I a lapsed Catholic? No!

Coincidentally with the National Day holiday, I wanted to go on a pilgrimage alone, hoping to be inspired again. I went to the Churches in Hong Kong and Macau for a pilgrimage. Aside from taking photos and saying prayers, I didn't do much or feel much. '*God is not God. God doesn't exist*. Thoughts like these were plentiful.'

God, where are you?

After returning to Shanghai, I went back to my ordinary and tedious life. Since I had done shopping in Hong Kong and Macau, I was a bit tight on my living expenses that month. There was also a credit card payment to be made: as a result, I quickly ran out of savings by the end of the month. I didn't have many close friends, so I was too embarrassed to borrow money from them.

I picked up the Rosary and started to pray, begging Mother Mary to pray to God for my sins.

At night, by chance I flipped open a currency collection album on the bookshelf and found a 50-yuan note inside. Thank God for helping me through that difficult time. My prayer had indeed been heard. God had not forsaken me. I was really moved.

With this 50-yuan note, I managed to make it to payday.

I kneeled in front of the statue of Our Lady in the Church, thanking Mother Mary for her intercession for my sins. I also thanked God for hearing my prayers. I continued to pray, asking God to bestow peace upon this world, and good health upon people I know.

Whenever we see a beggar in the subway or on the road, we often walk away quickly without giving him a thought. But beggars can be kind people as well. Once there was a charity bazaar outside the Church, and all the earnings were to be donated for the medical expenses of injured children. Fellow parishioners all generously contributed. Some even donated money without asking for any goods. After the bazaar, I was told by the organiser that there was a home-like sense of warmth both inside and outside our church. Even the beggars outside the church donated to the children in need. I was deeply touched. Despite being poor, they still retained their kindness and generosity to others. Shouldn't they be

the role models for us to learn from? God shows his glory in moving the beggars. Shouldn't we be more enthusiastic about charity work? Their stories lit a little flame in my heart.

A terrorist attack occurred in Paris, France on the evening of November 13. Next morning I woke up to this horrifying news spread on WeChat. Because my ex-boyfriend was studying in Paris, I was worried and immediately went onto Facebook to contact him. When I saw his message announcing that he was fine, I was relieved. It was good to be alive! I thanked God for protecting him. I finally realised how much stress and frustration you have to suffer, when you don't know if someone you care for is alive or dead. I realised how cruel I had been in the past.

I went to the church in the afternoon. It was a Saturday, so there was an anticipated Sunday Mass in the evening. It was my turn to be the altar server. I went to the church early, kneeling and praying the Rosary, hoping God would bestow peace upon the world and let there be no more disasters. I also prayed for the people who died in the attack, hoping God would take their souls to a better place. I also made a confession before the Mass, wishing that my own little prayer could be joined with everyone's prayers from all over the world, becoming one, strong outcry to God. At the evening Mass, the priest also specifically prayed for Paris, and those who unfortunately died in the incident, as well as the bereaved families. May God listen to our prayers, Amen!

Through these various incidents I realised that God never left me: God listened to my prayers. In the midst of life's sufferings, God will let you feel His presence through unexpected events or other people's actions.

Thinking about that half a year, I must have been so egocentric that God needed that much time to completely cleanse me of my sins.

My favourite story in the New Testament is the parable of the prodigal son. When the youngest son left home on his own to search for his own fate, the father did not stop him. Rather he let his son go, but continued to wait at home, waiting for his son's return. Finally, after the son had experienced all sorts of ups and downs during his journey, he returned home with a spirit of repentance. His father gladly welcomed the return of his child and did not blame him for anything. Lord, I hope

I can be like this youngest son and repent wholeheartedly. I wish to be worthy of your love again. Please forgive the sins I committed in the past, and please also forgive those who need to be forgiven. Amen!

On Sunday, I did a confession before the English Mass. I told everything about my sins to the priest—no, it was to Jesus. I prayed for forgiveness. The priest did not punish me harshly. He only asked me to read Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary once each. I finished reading them with tears in my eyes. I am back, Lord. I'm finally home!

Jesus, do you love me? Jesus, do you love me? Jesus, do you love me?

Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you. Jesus, I love you.

The end of a story but life goes on

Loving the right person is true love. Loving the wrong person is immaturity.

Among the most disturbing desires we have, one is love, another is sex in love. When what we crave for finally comes into reality, we always realise that it is not really all that desirable after all. Sometimes, it even makes us feel disappointed.

In this half a year, I experienced radical changes in life, including life and death. I finally have a deeper understanding of life and my future.

Regarding traitors, I choose to forgive them. I only hope they live well and are healthy. I am starting my new life. In my future life, there will be no resentment, no sorrow, only a positive attitude.

I felt like a small blade of grass. Despite struggling through storms, I still held on to a positive mindset, viewing storms as challenges that are part of growth. I store the rain as the spiritual food fuelling my onward journey and regard the sunshine as my motivation to grow. They are the photosynthetic process of my baptism of life. I won't complain about the storms anymore. I won't complain about people's disregarding me or about the environment in which I grow. I won't complain about the ruthlessness of nature anymore. I will stay grateful to God for giving me life and giving me the opportunity of enjoying all the gifts of nature. He lets me see the blue sky and the white clouds, gives me the opportunity of breathing the breath of nature. I will cherish it, relax my mind, and make myself stronger and better. Live out my own green world.

I have started to have a social life again. I have started swimming, jogging, travelling, etc. I am sure I can surpass my old self.

I think this is because I have faith: faith has brought so many positive impacts on my life: the establishment of life goals, the passion for working hard, the cultivation of spirituality, the formation of courage, the shaping of moral values, the improvement of physical and mental health, the handling of interpersonal relationships, the development of optimism and interests and the control of emotions.

It can be said that faith builds the meaning and values of life, whereas the lack of faith brings confusion.

Walk with Jesus, carry your own cross. Search, learn and accept God's gospel.

Lord, please come with me, be my light.

I will abandon all sins and follow the light!

My Homosexual Love

Qian Ai, Shanxi

When I was young, I enjoyed being held or hugged by older boys. I thought about boys all the time. When I was 18, I left my hometown to study elsewhere. I liked to look secretly at the seniors. I thought I was strange, different from ordinary people, until one day, I found out there were plenty of other boys like me. Since I had just learned about these things, I didn't understand what '*tongzhi*' meant, what '1' or '0'[1] meant, what 'the circle'[2] meant, and I was confused. I stayed silently in the circle for a few years, looking forward to finding a partner who would be kind to me. I still remember how shy and frightened I was when I had my first experience. After being in the circle for some time, I still hadn't met anyone whom I really loved and could live with. From 2008 to 2012, I was dating people casually here and there, but mostly feeling lonely.

In 2011, I returned home from college for the winter holiday. I used QQ to chat with people, and I met a guy online. We talked for a bit, then agreed to meet. Unlike others in the circle, he didn't ask for sex on our first date. Instead, we talked to each other. After a few days, we decided to start a serious relationship. He was the only one for whom I had real feelings in the circle. And thus, my love life began.

In the beginning, we lived together in the initial bliss of passion.

---

[1] LGBTQI+ people are sometimes called *tongzhi*, as the Chinese term for homosexuality (*tongxinlian*) also starts with the same character, *tong*, while *zhi* means the same aim or intention. The author also refers to terminologies used by the homosexual community. Generally speaking, '1' refers to the dominant person in the context of sexual behaviour, while '0' is the submissive one, but this distinction has no firm basis and many do not agree with it.

[2] Some homosexuals like to brand the community 'the circle', short for 'the homosexual circle'.

Despite having arguments occasionally, we've stayed together for a long time. It's already the fifth year for us. Even so, we did have a few occasions when we almost broke up.

After we had been together for a year, passion faded, and differences started to show. We became less interested in each other, and even secretly talked to other men. In the second half of the second year, we argued a lot, and almost broke up a few times. But in the end, we still wanted to be together.

In the next few years, we decided we would stay together forever. But I discovered that he had gone out with other men. The calm and rational me collapsed. I forgave him again and again, hoping that he would change, but he didn't. He still went to meet other men every now and then, and even told me that he had "taken safety measures."

I tolerated this for a long time, but finally exploded. To retaliate, I had a one-night stand with another man. But I felt so empty afterwards because the one I truly loved was him.

During that time, I spent most of my energy on our relationship, ignoring my faith. Because of this, I felt like a helpless child. However, one night in a dream, the loving Our Lady appeared in my dream. She was so bright in my dream, holding rosary beads in her hand while smiling at me. I revived my religious life again, starting to pray and recite the Rosary every day. I gained strength through praying, and I experienced the salvation and love of God at that special moment.

I tried to communicate with my partner. I said: "If you didn't think I was the right choice, then we should break up. Then you could find the men you want, and I would find the man I want." I couldn't endure betrayal anymore. He replied that he still loved me, that he was just having some fun. He begged for my forgiveness and told me that he truly loved me. He said he knew the one he wanted to be with. The affairs with other men were purely out of curiosity. After hearing those words, I felt better. We continued to live together.

After establishing this communication between us, we felt a lot more comfortable together. I began to release the bondage and let him think about things on his own. I realised that I couldn't keep what was not destined to be mine anyway. However, an accident in 2015 disrupted my life: a car accident fractured my left calf bone and I was admitted to

the hospital. My parents came over to take care of me. At that moment, I really needed to feel like I was well cared for. Although he did come to see me every now and then, during that period, I was always thinking over a lot of things. I realised that people like us have a rough life. We had so much to consider. Everyone would experience life and death, but two men would never have children together, so I hesitated. During my hospitalisation, the agony was not only manifested in physical pain but also mental suffering. I felt helpless. Fortunately, God's love slowly helped me make it through.

After my discharge from the hospital, I returned home for further rest. However, I was disappointed with what happened during the hospitalisation. We had a lot of friction. I even thought about giving up on this life and becoming straight.[3] During my time at home, I kept seeking the Lord's guidance and praying every day, but there was so much struggle in my heart. It was tough being gay! It's really tough! If two men wanted to be together, they should at least be able to take care of each other, as well as understand each other. It was not easy for two macho men to stay together.

I'm still recovering now, and we are still staying together. We communicate a lot more: "Let it be and let's cherish each other." It was by fate that we met and we shouldn't mess around. We have decided to walk the path together, in spite of the great difficulty. After the initial passion faded, we felt more like a family. I used to read lines like this in books, but now I finally experience it myself.

Conclusion: I wouldn't want to be gay in another life. It's so exhausting. The destiny of a gay person is not easy, but is it really something we can decide for ourselves? Who decides that I should be born gay? I really want to be with my partner forever, but we don't know what lies ahead of us. Why can't we get a blessing just like other people?

I wish all Christian homosexuals and heterosexuals a fulfilling and

---

[3] *Editor's note*: A heterosexual man is 'straight' compared to a homosexual ('bent') man. The author's statement represents a blurry and misguided concept sometimes found among homosexuals. Recent claims of successfully 'turning people straight' (changing sexual orientation from homosexuality to heterosexuality) have all proven false, thus making it clear that homosexuality is an unchangeable sexual orientation.

happy life. No matter what happens, we must trust our Lord. Faith is our strength! At all times, we must remember our Christian faith. We must pick ourselves up once again with the help of Our Lady. Jesus Christ said in the Bible: "Heaven and earth shall pass, but my words shall not pass." (Matthew 24:35) That's right. We should always bear our faith in mind. People and the world may let us down sometimes, but God never lets us down. "A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out" (Matthew 12:20). We must trust our Lord, especially people like us. We must rely on God's Grace and live a peaceful and joyful life! Go for it, sisters and brothers, if you are still living in confusion!

Such Glorious Grace

Freeman, Henan

First of all, allow me to pray to show my appreciation to God: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen! [*Makes the sign of the cross*]

When I was young, my family believed in Protestantism. There wasn't any church near our house, so we held religious gatherings at a house in a neighbouring village. I still remember that people usually sang, said 'Amen', and had different customs during the New Year. After that, I don't know how long it lasted because, after an incident with the Falun Gong, no one dared to gather again. Our family gradually distanced itself from the church. Later, Catholicism was introduced to our family by one of my mother's friends. I don't know what year it was but so far only I have received a Catholic baptism, and the rest of my family became followers of Buddhism or traditional religious beliefs.

After the Lunar New Year festival in 2012, around February, I went on my own to work in Shanghai. Many of my colleagues were Shanghai natives and they mostly went home during the weekend, leaving me alone in the company's dormitory. By then I already knew I was gay, but I had to pretend to be 'normal'. I could only get information about the gay circle through QQ groups on my phone. My fear of the gay circle and my identity was intolerable. At the same time, our family suffered the loss of my maternal grandmother, and of both of my grandfathers. My father was also severely ill at home, losing his sense of reason and basic self-care abilities. So my mother had to take care of him. It was the time when I had only just graduated from university and my elder brother had only just started working, two years after graduation. My younger sister was still attending university, so our family desperately needed a stable and sufficient source of income. My elder sister had

already married, so she couldn't be of much help. All this piled pressure on us, an ordinary rural family. This series of misfortunes led my mother and me to try fortune tellers, hoping for a way out through feng shui and fortune-telling. But the words from the fortune-tellers made my mother and me even more restless and anxious. Even though my mother was a strong woman, she couldn't help but feel so tormented that she was progressively losing weight. Our whole family was overshadowed by a dull and threatening atmosphere. We couldn't understand: our father was such a kind soul, why did this happen to him?

On July 7, 2012, when I was probably considered as part of the gay circle, I went to meet an online friend. However, the situation afterwards made me really upset. We had a good relationship, but that person just disappeared. I felt betrayed and cried for a whole day in the dormitory. About a month later, before the Mid-Autumn Festival in 2012, I got a call from my mother and my uncle, saying that my father had passed away as a result of his illness. It was a huge blow to our family. After the funeral, I returned to Shanghai. I remember that on both the seventh and hundredth days after my father's passing, as well as during the Hungry Ghost Festival, I went to a temple to burn joss paper for him. I could only cry, seeing the burning spirit money. I discreetly wiped away my tears and left quietly. At the same time, the people I met in the gay circle also made me feel uncomfortable. There was always a feeling of deception or distrust. I didn't have other friends or classmates in Shanghai. I was in an awful state of mind. Around December 2012, I gave up my well-paid job, and started to rent a flat while looking for another job.

After my father's passing, I occasionally spoke to my mother on the phone, and she would talk to me about the time when our family was Catholic. She said our family was not exactly well off then, but everything was all right. We were all quite healthy back then. All our siblings were well-behaved and did well at school. We weren't much involved in feng shui, fortune-telling, or those kinds of scary things. After my father's death, I blamed everything on our family for following Buddhism and traditional religions, although now I do not think that was wise.

After the Lunar Year Festival of 2013, I got a position in a Taiwanese enterprise. A vice-president often invited me to participate in the

activities organised by his church. I didn't understand it then, but I was surprised that in Shanghai, there was a group of people like that, displaying a strong sense of friendship and unity. I enjoyed hanging out with them. It was a great comfort to me at that time. After a while, I realised I might get baptised at their church, and I hesitated. After all, I was different from them. I feared their reactions if they found out my sexual orientation because I gradually realised that the Christian Church strongly condemns homosexuality. I felt like a criminal, pretending to be normal among them. I dared not mention anything to them, for fear of being kicked out. Maybe I was too sensitive. I did enjoy our gatherings, but I usually felt guilty afterwards, as if a table of delicacies had been placed in front of a starving me, but I wasn't allowed to enjoy it.

During that time, I liked to travel around the city. I went to many places in Shanghai. When I visited the St Ignatius Cathedral, I was taken by the quiet atmosphere of the church and was moved by the efforts of the church's 'tour guides' (volunteers). I didn't know how they could be so happy, despite living in this cold and desolate city of Shanghai. Every time I walked past a statue in the church, I wanted to kneel and beg for help, even if it was only for a moment. But I was scared. So I pretended to be just an average tourist, while all I really wanted was to touch a statue's foot or the decorative flowers in front of the statues. But in the end, I could only tightly grasp the railing in front of the statues and leave after staring at them for a long time. I hoped that the railing would convey my desperation to God.

At the end of 2013, I left my job again. I don't know what happened to me then. I almost went mad. After leaving the company, I still took part in their fellowship gatherings occasionally, but I felt more and more uncomfortable. Meanwhile, I started to gain more understanding of the differences and similarities between Catholicism and Protestantism. My impression of Catholicism was that it was much stricter. For those who might have a lot of bad habits like me, Catholicism could be better at helping a person restrain himself. I was also more inclined to get baptised in the more traditional and solemn Catholic Church.

I've forgotten when it was that I also stopped visiting temples. I used to be devoted to Buddhism, but not anymore. I felt like I was betraying my faith. Meanwhile, I participated in many Christian gatherings,

learning more and more about the Christian faith. I even bought a pocket-size copy of the Bible from the fellowship in my previous workplace. During that time, I felt guilty about betraying my Buddhist faith while at the same time I was also gaining a deeper understanding of the Christian faith.

In the spring of 2014, I learned from a phone call that my mother had acute appendicitis and was in desperate need of surgery. I became very worried, probably because I was still haunted by my father's death. But I couldn't go home. The doctor told me that there was excessive fat around the surgical area, which made it riskier. I felt even more panicked, anxious and desperate, because surgery seemed to be such a horrible and severe matter to me. The night before my mother's surgery, at around 8 pm, it was quite chilly, and I asked a friend of mine from the gay circle to come with me. We went to the St Ignatius Cathedral. It was closed already. Because my friend didn't know much about the Christian faith, I asked him to wait for me on the main road in front of the church. I went on my own and stood between the two cedars near the square in front of the main church door. I kneeled and cried. I don't know how long it was, I only remember there were some people walking past me. I didn't know who was represented by the white statue outside of the wall, and I didn't know Jesus. I just thought to myself that the cross on top of the church should represent the same God as the red cross I saw at home when I was a child, when my family believed in the Christian faith. I decided to go all out. I didn't care anymore. I must grasp onto something. Maybe I was a sinner, but my mother was innocent. I prayed that my mother's surgery would go well. If someone must be punished, let me be the one. Our family couldn't take another blow. I couldn't do anything else. There was no other way out. At that moment, outside the church, I felt like an abandoned lamb who was banished by God. Maybe I had sinned, so God wouldn't accept me. It seemed like the entire world had shut the door upon me. Fortunately, my mother's surgery did go well. She recovered steadily. I had a growing desire for faith and the support it brought. Now that I think of it, I was blindly searching for a way out, almost like a drowning man clutching at a straw.

I don't remember at what time I went to St Ignatius Cathedral on my own, and I saw the notice about a catechism class.[1] I had seen it many times before, but I had no courage to sign up. That time I finally asked the door guard about it, with my heart beating like a drum. He was wrapped up by a long trench coat, and replied assertively, saying that the church was planning for a major renovation and no longer accepted new applicants. He didn't seem very nice. I felt rejected. Combining my sexuality and low self-esteem, I felt like I was rejected by God Himself. It was what I expected. So I went out of the church, feeling ashamed and embarrassed. After that, I didn't dare to go to church, thinking that God must be blaming me for what I'd done. I was not qualified to pursue the Catholic faith. Sometimes I did visit a church, but only looked at it from the outside, then left.

Then one day, I learned about a pop star named Ricky Martin,[2] who was a homosexual Catholic believer. I watched both his interviews on *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*[3] online and was deeply moved. Maybe it was like that quote, 'There's nothing wrong with love'. I started to think that I should pursue faith as well, even if no one else accepted me. As long as I could be a good person and help others, God would eventually give me a chance.

After that, I made plans to get into the church. In May, I looked up the information regarding the Catholic churches in Shanghai. I knew there was going to be a major renovation at St Ignatius Cathedral, so I excluded it. In the end, I decided to go to a church in Huangpu District.

---

1 For new believers or people who are interested in learning the faith, the church organises foundation classes that usually last for a year. At the end of the class, after talking with the priests, participants can decide whether they want to be baptised into the church.

2 Ricky Martin is a Puerto Rican pop singer who has won several international music awards. Born to a Catholic family, he used to be an altar server. Later he became interested in Buddhist philosophy. In August 2008, he became father of twins through a surrogate mother. He came out of the closet in 2010, and delivered a speech at the United Nations LGBT Human Rights Conference on November 12, 2012.

3 Both Oprah Winfrey and Ellen DeGeneres hosted popular talk shows. Both have always supported the LGBTQI+ community and criticised homophobic behaviour. Some believe that Oprah had a positive impact on the legalisation of same-sex marriage in the US. DeGeneres famously came out on Oprah's show in 1997.

My notebook is marked clearly that my first presence in a catechism class there was on May 24. That happened to be the last month for the catechism class in the first half of the year. I didn't sign up or register, and I was happy enough just to sit in with those 'normal people' and listen to the priest. In the class, the priest shared his experience of converting from Buddhism to Catholicism. He said, "we are looking for the one true faith—our Lord, and we have found Him. We should feel lucky." It eliminated my doubts and anxiety about leaving Buddhism behind and my former company (the one with Protestant fellowship gatherings). Maybe I wasn't destined to follow either Buddhism or Protestantism. Similar classes gave me a lot of strength and confidence. I attended all of them quietly and carefully, worrying that the priest and other parishioners might find out my identity. The class was every Saturday afternoon. After the class ended at 6 pm, I joined the Mass at around 6.30 pm. I didn't know anyone in that church. I was always on my own, but I could feel the enthusiasm of the preachers, priests and other volunteers. I always hid myself in a corner of the church, feeling too ashamed to be near to the altar. There were times when I was kneeling on the pew during the Mass, listening to the sacred music with tears in my eyes, I couldn't help but ask why I was so lonely, not like so many other people who had friends accompanying them. But at the same time, I tried to comfort myself. With faith, I could be strong and mature, just as the priest had said during classes: God wanted to see us happy. I thought to myself: if I could successfully sign up for the next catechism classes, I would quietly attend the classes together with other people. I wouldn't talk too much about myself, so they wouldn't discover my identity. As long as I could get baptised, even if I couldn't go to church, I could at least read the Bible at home. As long as I had faith in my heart, and I stayed virtuous and followed God's laws, God would eventually accept me, just like Ricky Martin.

At the same time, two church members from my previous company's fellowship asked me why I didn't join their Bible study group and receive baptism. I didn't know how to answer, so I told them my identity indirectly. They didn't say much right away, but gave me some Biblical

verses to read. Through those anti-homosexual verses,[4] I knew their attitude. They said it was a sin, and it wasn't comforting, not in the slightest. I felt like a sinner, didn't even dare to look them in the eyes. I just wanted to go home and cry. Then they said they would accompany me in studying the Bible, hoping to cure me through praying and Bible reading. I knew they meant well, but according to what I'd learned, it was an 'incurable illness'. Eventually, I told them that I was attending Catholic catechism classes secretly. After refusing to join their fellowship gatherings a few times, we rarely contacted each other again.

While I was secretly attending the catechism classes, I also read books about Catholicism. Recalling the past two years of being in the gay circle, there was so much sadness, loneliness, fear, struggle and helplessness. Sometimes I felt like I was walking on a thin wire. I disliked my bad habits and shortcomings, and some were even detrimental. I could not accept myself... I lost the energy to work hard, and I didn't feel like doing anything at all. I usually just slept through the time after work or on weekends. It was hard to sleep, though. I originally believed that there could be pure love in the gay circle, but my experiences had let me down. Being stubborn as I was, I refused to give in. I believed that there must be sincere people whom I could trust. But they never showed up. I was exhausted, stressed and feeling helpless. I did not know why I felt such huge pressure and a feeling of helplessness. I knew it was wrong to commit suicide. That's why on several occasions, I tried to comfort myself: don't be scared. It's okay to go to the rooftop. Don't jump. Just look down from above and walk back downstairs.

Every time I made friends online, whether it was an outing or something else, afterwards they usually vanished on me, leaving a sense of bitterness in my heart. I felt betrayed. I disliked them disappearing after our first face-to-face contact, but many were like that. Even if I was

[4] There are seven texts often cited by Christians to condemn homosexuality: Genesis 9:20-27, Genesis 19:1-11, Leviticus 18:22, 20:13, 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1:10, Romans 1:26-27. There are many scholarly efforts against this misinterpretation. The most recent and comprehensive document is *Christian Objections to Same Sex Relationships: An Academic Assessment*, published by Wijngaards Institute for Catholic Research in October 2020. See https://www.wijngaardsinstitute.com/academic-statement-ethics-same-sex-relationships/.

being sincere, I could feel the thick invisible walls others built around themselves. I had one as well. Many times, I simply wanted a hug or a handshake, just to feel that someone else was still standing near me, and it didn't matter if their heart wasn't with me. But the world didn't answer my desperate calls. I couldn't see any hope. I was scammed a few times, and my heart was broken again and again. I even started deceiving people myself with fake icons and insincere messages. I knew it wasn't all the others' fault, that I was a part of the problem. But mobile phones and the internet were always giving me a sense of insecurity and disappointment. I couldn't feel safe at all, but at the same time I couldn't just leave this circle. I fell into a vicious cycle with no way out. I thought that if I continued to walk this path, I would eventually be like a dead man walking, withering in desperation and dying alone. I kept uninstalling and reinstalling various kinds of dating apps. Amid this erratic chaos, I almost felt like I'd reached the end of my life, but I knew I must not give up, ever. I must believe there could be true love, and most importantly I must believe my conscience. Just like drowning in the wide, wide ocean, I must keep struggling, or I'd lose my life.

A ray of hope shone on me on the Saturday evening of June 21, 2014. I returned home after the evening catechism class and was talking to a friend from Xi'an who was also in the circle. I told him that I'd gone to the church, bought the Bible and the Rosary beads, but the catechism class still made me very uncomfortable with my identity. He then gave me a link to the Rainbow Catholic Fellowship. I clicked on the link, joined the QQ group for Shanghai Rainbow Catholic Fellowship, and talked a bit with a member called Eros. In fact, during the evening Mass, I noticed a guy with a grey briefcase walking past me, sitting in the middle of the front seat not far from the altar, along with three other men. My gaydar[5] told me that they seemed to be the same as me, so I thought they were probably secretly taking the class as well. I didn't think too much about it because of the Mass, but then when I was home and

[5] Gaydar, a portmanteau of 'gay' and 'radar', refers to the intuitive ability of homosexual community to identify each other. There is experimental evidence proving gaydar indeed exists, but disputes remain.

talking to Eros, I realised he was one of the four guys sitting in front. They were the members of the Shanghai Rainbow Catholic Fellowship, and they were also taking the catechism class. We had been in the same class for almost a month, walking past each other in Masses, only to realise this truth on June 21. I suddenly felt like I'd found a group where I belonged. It was heart-warming. I was excited and grateful for this coincidence. I couldn't help but imagine that it was also God's arrangement. I needed a sense of belonging, after all.

Then at noon of June 29, while they were baptised, I was fortunate enough to witness the ceremony. In the afternoon, I met Eros and other members. Their enthusiasm gave me great encouragement and eased my anxiety and worry. They had given me a lot of care and hope. Since following the Catholic faith, I have been able to lead a chaste and undefiled life. This is what I want. I think I will continue this path, and God will lead the way. In a sense, God has given me a new life, but I still need to learn and be mature to become perfect. I have more confidence in the future. So far, many fellow brothers and sisters have helped and accompanied me through the difficulties, to continue gaining an understanding of the Catholic faith.

Just like those words 'Jesus loves you, welcome home!' what makes me feel warm and welcomed are the hugs and handshakes during each fellowship gathering. They feel so encouraging to me. I have finally found my home. We are a family that loves each other. Thank God! I pray that I can continue to approach this true and original faith, continue to learn. May God lead us the right way, to support each other. May God bless our fellowship!

Soon after, I was also baptised. I met a friend and started to serve in the church enthusiastically. Although I still have many identity issues, I believe that everything would turn out to be good in God's love. I believe that everything that God arranges must be good. As long as we pray regularly, we should let everything be decided by God, and with love, we move forward bravely.

This was the miracle I encountered!

Stand Up, You Good-For-Nothing!

Yu Han, Beijing

> "Other members of the Church accuse me of being sinful. All right, I confess my sin, but I would not have it any other way because my happiness hinges on it."

At a meeting, I listened to a gay Christian talking about how they were not accepted by the "traditional Church," how they managed to find a Christian community willing to accept them, and how they gradually learned to understand themselves. Everyone else was in tears but I was completely unaffected. I thought to myself, "Am I being too cold-hearted?"

When I was a child, my father was very strict with me, but he was also very lenient in some respects. Basically, I had to rely on myself for many things. If I didn't know a particular word, I'd check the dictionary. I went to school and came home on my own. If I got bullied, I'd stand up for myself and fight back. My family never forced me to study hard. Everything was my own responsibility. I made my own choice of the school I wanted to attend after graduation and what subject I wanted to study. No matter whether it was for work or for travel, my family neither raised objections nor showed support for my decision.

After entering university, I fell in love with someone, a man, just like me. In those days, all I wanted was to be with him and so like that, I spent seven years with my first lover.

From studying and working to having a relationship or staying single, I have always dealt with my personal problems on my own. There is no 'relying on others' in my dictionary. I travelled far, walked into the church, joined a catechism course and got baptised. No one ever invited me to the church, and no one preached to me. I was the one

who approached God's embrace. I learned about God. Maybe my creed should be changed to 'I can't count on other people but I can rely on God.' But even though I learned about God, I still don't want to rely on Him. Rather, I've strengthened my belief in 'relying on oneself'.

When I first joined the church, I often attended a 'family meeting group'. There were many women studying the Bible together and sharing their spiritual formation experience. There was one time when the topic was about prayer. Everyone talked about how they prayed to God, how the prayers were answered, how miraculous it was. I asked if they pray on every possible matter and a friend who was studying theology said it was necessary. I said to him, "Some of these things can be done by ourselves. Surely God is already busy dealing with more important things. I don't want to burden him with minor things." My friend replied, "God's power is beyond our imagination. You should not underestimate him." I thought, "Yeah, He is God after all." Of course, He can do anything and everything. So I started praying. After that, I made countless prayers, but it seemed that God did not answer them. On one occasion, I was unable to find a job for four months. I struggled and had to dip into my small savings. Finally, I was able to find a job, but one that I did not like at all. That experience was a huge blow to me. However, I never questioned why God did not arrange something good for me. Maybe I was already used to relying on myself and I did not expect him to arrange for me.

Usually, at this point, someone will say, "Who do you think God is? Should He give you whatever you ask for? Aren't you treating God like a servant or a housekeeper?" I particularly hate this argument. It hurts the feelings of those who pray diligently to God. The people who say this are usually the ones who like to brag about their own testimony, how their prayers were answered, completely oblivious of their inconsistencies.

I reflected on my past and realised that it is not a matter of whether He is being treated as a servant or not, but it is completely His freedom to decide whether He answers one's calls. God gives me freedom and lets me live far away from home. He lets me decide what to love and hate, and lets me approach Him in my own way. God respects my freedom. In this case, I also need to respect God's freedom, and respect His decisions to give or not to give. If He gives, I will make an effort to take it. If He doesn't give, then it's useless to struggle for it. "Your heavenly Father

already knows what you need before you even ask." From the day I was born, He has arranged everything for me, but it shouldn't be easy for me to achieve all my goals. I must work hard for them. Perhaps, my motto, "I should rely on no one, and I must take the initiative into my own hands," is the inspiration God gave me.

We must talk about sexual orientation.

I'm gay but it doesn't affect others. This is my own business. I am not ashamed of myself. Self-approval has nothing to do with deciding to come out or not. It is just a secret about me. Everyone has their own secrets. There is no need for people to show their self-approval by disclosing their secrets. Though I am baptised, I still remain homosexual, although the Church won't accept me for the most part. Throughout the past eight years of my baptised life, I have only heard about "the sin of homosexuality" in two Masses, and one passing mention of it in a church meeting, but the topic was soon dropped with the sentence, "Let's not talk about this." The Catholic's attitude towards homosexuality is quite mild. I still believe in God. Other church members accuse me of being sinful. All right, I confess I have sinned. But I would not have it any other way because my happiness hinges on it. God loves everyone, including sinners. Everyone is sinful in their own way, not to mention that my sins are defined and condemned by man. The true power of judgment rests in the hands of God. If I were truly sinful, God would have struck me down long ago. Others would not even have time to point a finger at me.

The mortal world is full of good and evil, as well as gossip about others being good or evil. Flowers bloom in springtime, but no one knows who they are blooming for.

At gatherings of fellow Catholics, we often talk about self-identification among homosexual people. When it comes to self-identification, it is mostly not about whether you accept your own self. Rather, it is usually about the surrounding world, whether the people around you accept you or not. Just as I care about how I look in the mirror, I have reflected on my self-identification: once I thought about it carefully, I realised that accepting my sexual orientation only played a small role in self-identification. I must work hard to enhance my parents' quality of life as well as my own. I must love boldly to prove that I believe in love. I must trust my partner and prove that I am a reliable person.

I must sharpen my skills at work to prove that I can be entrusted with difficult tasks. I must live a wonderful life and prove that I don't need to worry God with many trivial things… There are many aspects in which I can identify with and approve of myself: why do I need to make a special effort about the aspect of sexual orientation? God has given many features to my identity and sexual orientation is just one of them. It's not everything. It's not worthy of being everything! Self-identification in sexual orientation and other aspects are not contradictory with one another, and all aspects are essential to my being. However, the self-identification in my sexual orientation should not take up too much of my energy. God has given me so much. I can't waste all my time on only one thing.

God not only gives me freedom, but also respects my freedom. I must trust Him and return His kindness. What I am afraid of is not whether I will go to hell for homosexuality. Rather, my most feared situation would be this: that I leave this world and meet God and He says, "I gave you freedom. I gave you a whole vast world. In return, what have you given me?" And I am speechless. This is what I fear the most. God trusts me. How dare I disappoint him?

When I came out to my father, he said, "You are old enough to decide about your own life. It's your life, your decision." I did not expect God to place the freedom of life in my hands through my father's speech. What my father said showed his deep love and approval of me. By trusting in God, I will trust in myself even more. He respects my freedom, and I am going to show him the harvest that I reap. God decides that I should live and when I should die, but he allows me to decide how I live and love. God is my teacher. He sends me all kinds of practice questions and test papers. If I am wrong, then I will correct my mistake. If I am right, then I should proceed with the next question. This is of course only natural—what student would beg their teacher for answers to an exam before they even attempt it?

Maybe there will come a day when I will fall into utter despair. No one would approve of me. The Church would reject me because of my homosexuality, and I would not know what to do. If I cry out, "Lord, help me!" will God say sternly, "Stand up, you good-for-nothing!"? Fortunately, this day has not come, and I certainly don't want this day to

come. I want God to trust that I can stand on my own.

Although God's power exceeds human imagination, I am just a human. I can only view God from a human perspective. He might be busy and exhausted and in need of a short break from work. The world is so big and He has been working so hard. I must take good care of myself, so He won't need to worry about me. Sometimes I imagine my role in heaven would be opening the door for God when He comes home from work and saying "Welcome back. It must have been a busy day for you." Then I would drape a coat over His shoulders when he falls asleep at the desk or cover Him with the duvet.

The strong ones are always lonely. God must feel even more lonely. I must do my very best, and hopefully one day I might be standing beside Him.

My Answer: A Gay and Religious Path

Ting Ming, Shaanxi

> "I did not know what to do. It was my dream to be religious. I prayed to God for His grace for two years. I even complained and felt resentment about being gay."

I am a religious man and I am also gay. That can make some people feel very strange, how can a gay man also be religious? Doesn't God hate gay people? This is a question in the minds of many people.

I found out that I was gay only after I entered the seminary. I just couldn't accept myself when I knew that I was gay. I often asked, "Why am I gay? Why do I love men?" I think only God knows the answers to these questions!

There are many words and events of homosexuality in the Bible. In Genesis, God destroyed the city of Sodom,[1] with fire and brimstone out of heaven killing all the people in the city. Leviticus 18:22 also reads: "You are not to sleep with a man as with a woman: this is detestable." And in the first and second chapters of Genesis, God gives human beings an order that a man should be joined to his wife and bring forth children, so homosexuality seems to violate God's will. But what about us as homosexuals? Who can fully understand the feeling of involuntarily being gay?

As a homosexual, how do I view my dual identity? First of all, as a

---

[1] *Editor's note*: In traditional hermeneutics, the destruction of Sodom was related to homosexuality, but contemporary exegesis suggests that Sodom's sin refers to the crime of refusing hospitality. The following quotations are similar, referring to heterosexual men having sex with other men. Neither has anything to do with the modern concept of homosexuality. But we retained and translated the original text to respect its author.

religious person, I follow the rules of the seminary in my way of living. I perform my duties, participate in prayer actively and serve those who need help. Then, as a gay man, what do I need to do? To work hard in obeying the commandments of God, to restrain my desires and to pray more. However, what should I do when facing temptation? I have to seek the help of God, often through the Eucharist. What is the most effective way to reject temptation? To rely on the goodness of God, so the devil will be defeated without a fight.

I wanted to be loved too in the past. Before I knew that I was gay, I longed for the love of Jesus and the love of people around me. But when I discovered that I was gay, what I longed for was love from another man.

There is a question that many people talk about. Should a gay or lesbian Christian fall in love with another gay or lesbian? Or should gay Christians have the right to marry the persons they love? People need love, long for love and long for being loved. They all need dependence and support. Therefore, I feel that both straights and gays should have the right to love and be loved. They all have the right to fight for their own happiness.

I have had three intimate homosexual relations. The first one was met through an online app for gay people. He and I were not in the same province. Although I never met him, I was still very happy to chat with him. One day he told me that a gay person cannot be religious. I didn't know what to do at that time. His words that a gay person cannot be a religious often came back into my mind. I did not know what to do. It was my dream to be religious. I prayed to God for His grace for two years. I even complained and felt resentment about being gay.

Encouraged by him, I decided to leave the seminary and leave the religious life. When I left the seminary, my classmates said to me: "Think of the dedication you have shown in the seminary during all these years here." The rector tried to keep me and said, "Think it over. Think about it. The priests and nuns here make such good comments about you. The faithful care so much about you and your religious brothers support you so much. Do you really want to leave?" I replied: "Rector, I can deceive you, deceive my laypeople, deceive my religious brothers, but I can't deceive God and myself." When the rector saw that I had made up my mind, he said to me, "Go in peace. In the changeable secular world, don't

forget God." So I bade farewell to the rector and stepped out of the gate of the seminary.

I thought that I would never return to the seminary, but God's plan is always so wonderful. Weeks after I went home, I kept receiving calls from many lay Catholics to persuade me to go back to the seminary. But because of not wanting to 'lose face', I didn't want to go back. One morning, two unexpected visitors came to lead me back onto the right track. They were the superior of the diocesan religious women's community and one of her nuns. Their arrival changed my mind. In the conversation, the two nuns could sense that I was unwilling to go back because I didn't want to lose face. They gave me a lot of examples. Finally, the superior said: "Be humble." Because of these words, I decided to take up my vocation again.

There is no contradiction between homosexuality and religious life. Since God wants us to evangelise for Him, it means that God does not dislike same-sex orientation as some people do. Our dedication is the same as the heterosexual religious persons. Gay people can also become good religious people. Gay people can still live out a good, consecrated life, live out their faith and live out the image of Christ.

Through my example, I want to tell my brothers and sisters that a homosexual orientation is not a sin. Don't be afraid because you are gay since homosexuals are also a special group chosen by God. Believe that our God is a merciful, loving God. We are all sinners. No matter how grave the sins we have committed, how many wrong things we have done that offend God and hurt Him so much, as long as we are humble and willing to repent, God is very willing to forgive us. Because, just as God says, we are the children that He loves. The Father has to make His children realise His sincerity, as He is the Father. Let us unite to let us gay people live in dignity, be understood, and use our real actions to prove that we gay people are not shameful and are not to be feared. What is to be feared is having a heart without compassion.

May God bless us all!

Reason Lights the Path of Faith

Thomas, Heilongjiang

> "Before I accepted my faith, I had two identities: a doctor and a gay. Since that day, I have one more identity: Christian. I am proud of all these identities."

I was born in a border town in northeastern China. I grew up in a time when the northeast was rapidly declining under the impact of the market economy. Dilapidated factories were filled with despair, abandoned by the times. My parents were among the tens of thousands of laid-off workers. They were rushing after a livelihood, satisfied with petty happiness. I should have been like those thousands of children there: studying, going to college, working, marrying and having children: the process went on. But when the Lord created me, he added too many qualities that were incompatible with that environment: introverted, rational, unwilling to be mediocre, and most importantly, I was gay. So when I was young, I felt that I was different from others and that I should try to go far away to pursue something, like a call. Then I encountered my faith.

Our neighbour next door was a middle-aged woman. Her husband died when she was very young. She brought up three children alone. Her eldest son died in a car accident when he was almost 30. From then on, she began attending the church in the town. The church, in fact, could hardly be called one as it was just a small courtyard. I went past it every day on my way to school. My parents never let me go there. At that time, I felt that only those with a troubled fate needed faith to seek comfort, and this had nothing to do with me.

When I was a child, I was introverted and had few friends. My parents were busy earning a livelihood and often locked me at home

alone. So I asked my parents to buy a lot of books for me to read at home, such as *Ten Thousand Questions to Ask* and many popular science books of all kinds, no matter how incomprehensible: astronomy, geography, biology. It was lucky that in those days TV shows were still rare. I was obsessed with the laws of nature described in these books: how the universe was formed and where humans came from. You have to imagine a child who was just in elementary school, surrounded by so many ultimate unknowns: the shock and impact could be lifelong. This may be the reason why I chose to study medicine later. In the universe known to man, our body is the most complicated machine.

I studied human anatomy during college, and this course had a big impact on my previous worldview. We have been educated in the idea that there is no God in the world and that life evolves naturally. But in the human body, the details from the skin, organs, tissues to cells, molecules, genes on all levels are full of a sense of design. The shape and angle of the bones, the distribution of blood vessels, the formation of the senses, especially the eyes, which are incomparably superior to the most sophisticated cameras in the world today. Even Charles Darwin acknowledges in his *On the Origin of Species* that the eyes of creatures are so complex that they are difficult to explain from the theory of evolution.

The above are just a few very simple examples. There are more complex designs like the cardiac electrical activity, neuroendocrine regulation, brain consciousness, and even love. I remember that a few years ago, scientists found on Mars several mountains arranged in regular polygons (I forget the details), and thought that they could not be formed naturally, and were evidence of the existence of intelligent life. What puzzled me was that, when confronted with a human body that is so much more complex than a polygon, scientists say that it is a product of natural evolution. Isn't this a contradiction? In my opinion, evolution can explain the evolution of each species: why the giraffe's neck is getting longer and longer, and the human brain is getting bigger and bigger. But if we try to use evolution to explain the origin of life, it is hard for me to accept that life in this world developed naturally from a molecule or a cell. The human pursuit of science is really a process of asking the Creator for answers. When an explorer rushes into the deepest part of the jungle of truth, he must surely realise how awkward the system of atheism is.

However, accepting creationism and accepting the Christian faith are two different things. I really got to Christianity only as a result of my work. I am a doctor. Because of the special nature of my work, I have a deeper understanding of suffering and life and death. In the face of death, people's ability is so small that they are desperate. Most of the time, doctors can only comfort them. Once a dying patient asked me: "Where will people go after death?" I had no answer. There is an English drama called *Penny Dreadful*, in which a 19th-century doctor says something shocking:

> There is only one real purpose of scientific exploration: That is to solve the mystery of life and death. Nothing else matters, from the deepest part of the sea to the highest peak on the farthest planet. Only life and death. The passage from life to death happens in an instant, as rapid as the flap of a bat's wings and is more meaningful than any sonnets. That is my river. That is my mountain. That is where I want to plant my flag.

I always believe that the reason why people pursue faith is after all because of confusion and they look for answers to their lives, to life and death, and an ultimate answer. The particularity of the gay community is that they tend to be more confused about themselves than ordinary people. Seeking God makes us recognise our true self and understand the meaning of God's creation.

My first contact with the Gospel was through the Rainbow Witness Fellowship, because it was a fellowship for gay Christians. I felt very fortunate to have the company of the fellowship in the early days when I first encountered my faith. Seeing the testimonies of so many brothers and sisters, I was relieved from the conflict between sexual orientation and faith. Later, I took part in the church's catechism class and Bible study. There I found a new theoretical system that could explain the world. For more than 2,000 years, it has convinced hundreds of millions of people and me also. My understanding of the world has become clear. I know where I come from and where I am going. This is a feeling that I have never found in any class or in any book. Therefore, I believe in God not to obtain grace but simply to believe that the world runs as it does, because it was created by God. I'm like Thomas the Apostle: he only believed in the resurrection of Jesus after seeing with his eyes and

touching with his hands (John 20:25). I did not accept the Gospel right away from the beginning. It happened when I saw the magic of the Creator and the testimony of the brothers and sisters in the fellowship. They are the body of Jesus, the nail holes in his hands. I saw that, I touched that and I believe it.

In addition to the core of the faith, the solemn Catholic rituals, the stories of the saints, and its mercifulness give me a strong sense of belonging. It is more useful to listen to a priest in the Church than the so-called chicken soup for the soul. Chicken soup is just chicken soup. When you are well, you can drink one or two cups. When you are sick, chicken soup is useless, only faith can help. Faith is the real medicine. When you encounter hardship, it is the medicine that can save you.

Before I accepted my faith, I had two identities: a doctor and a gay man. Since that day, I have one more identity: Christian. I am proud of all these identities.

I am a doctor, and rationality is a gift from God. I see the magic of creation with my rational eyes and watch the weakness and powerlessness of the human heart at the end of life. Especially for doctors in China, this is undoubtedly a dark period of life that is not understood, and it is extremely easy to be disheartened. But God lets me know that even if no one else cares, the Lord will care, and I will be more determined to honour the Lord. In fact, the Church is also a hospital to heal the soul. I am running between the hospital and the church, to feel the power of faith, hope and love.

I am gay. I have been thinking about why God made me gay. Now, in retrospect, my identity as a gay man has become a key to my search for God. It allows me to believe on the perceptual level that this omnipotent creator is not a cold, unfeeling god, but a loving God who loves us so much that He offers His only Son to us. He creates us in colourful ways. He loves what we are.

It is very difficult to maintain a stable relationship between gays. It is God who teaches how to love. Love is not possession, but giving. When feeling hurt, I can still pray for the person who hurts me, wishing that God will give him happiness. This was unimaginable before I believed in God. After praying, let go and start all over again, to reach for the arrangement that suits the Lord.

I am a Christian. When I am deep in the ocean of faith, I find that it is far beyond reason and I become happy and calm. When suffering, I am less anxious and less afraid. In my personal life, I also constrain my words and deeds. I learn to be more forgiving to the harm others cause me and know how to pray for those who hurt me. When Jesus was on the cross, he was still weeping for those who wounded him: "Lord, please forgive them because they don't know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). Then, when we encounter unfairness, can we pray for those who hurt us?

People say that God is close to a sad person. I also had low times in my life. I was as helpless as a lost sheep. I felt that the whole world was gray and dark. However, God did not choose me at that time. This does not mean that God forgot me. He made me calm out of sorrow. Now He prevents me from trusting Him out of a temporary impulse, but He lets me climb upwards along another rational path. Lord, I thank you.

Differences Everywhere

An-an, Zhejiang

My mother was a teacher at an elementary school, so when I was studying there, my classmates were too afraid to come over to play. When they walked past my home after school, they would even lower their voices. Naturally, no one dared to come in and do homework with me, not to mention watch TV together. So in my elementary school days I barely had any friends. Now recalling the past, I hardly remember the names of any of my classmates. I cannot even remember the name of the classmate who sat next to me. I only recall that she was mature for her age.

This situation continued until I got to junior high school. Starting in my second year I could choose to board at school. Boarding also meant attending a lengthy self-study session every evening, but I endured it in exchange for a little more time to sleep in the morning.

Not long after the school year started, the weather turned cold, so everyone brought their thick duvets from home. It was a freezing night. The self-study evening session had ended. Even the chatting in the dormitory had quieted down. Yet I could not sleep because my roommate had not returned. I had asked others, but no one could tell me where he had gone.

Lying in bed, I tossed and turned, wanting to go look for him. But where to start? He could not possibly have left school to go to an internet café, could he? Or had his family picked him up because of some incident? Or was it too dark and he had tripped over something? Or...

While I was still thinking, he returned and lay down on his bed, mumbling about how cold he felt. I asked him where he had been. He said he had been punished by the class teacher, who hit his palm. He stretched his hand out to show me. I reached out to his cold hand, and

my heart trembled. I did not know where the urge came from but I pulled him into my bed. "You must be feeling very cold. I will help warm you up," I said.

That night, two young boys cuddled together. My hands were holding his, and my face was close to his. My lips got to touch his.

From that time, we slept in the same bed every night. That winter was especially warm.

In 2003, I entered senior high school. At that time writing letters was very popular. Everyone wrote to their junior high school friends who were then studying in other schools. This was, on the one hand, to prove how popular they were. On the other hand, they wanted to gain information to gossip about, such as the real reason for some random group fight in a particular senior high school, or why someone had been expelled from school.

Aside from writing letters, the internet had also gotten more popular. Everyone registered a QQ account, starting the era of online chatting. Gossip spread from the senior high schools in the local city to the entire nation. You talked to your online friends and they talked to their online friends. Everyone enjoyed online chatting.

Until one day.

That day everyone was using QQ in the computer room as usual. A classmate noticed I seemed to be having a good time, so he asked, "Do you have a lot of online friends?" I replied, "Not really that many." He then said, "Well, you can at least introduce me to some pretty girls, can't you?" I answered, "Pretty girls? I don't know any." He was surprised. "Then who are you talking to? Let me have a look."

He checked my friend list thoroughly, and asked, "Why are they all boys?" I said, "If I am not talking to boys, am I supposed to talk to girls instead?"

Creepy!

What was wrong with that? Didn't boys all hang out with boys in school? Shouldn't boys be chatting with boys online as well?

Intrigued, I began to search for more information. A new world opened to me.

My mother was a Christian. She loved the Lord very much and was very fervent, very enthusiastic. But I was the opposite.

Student life always passes quickly. In a blink of an eye, we had to start planning for the future, going each his own way. My classmates were busy sending out résumés and having interviews. When I had first met them, they had yet to mature. But now they were putting on their finest suits and ties. Girls wore high heels and put on make-up. I almost wondered if they were the same group of people with whom I had studied.

Everyone was full of expectations for graduation. The usual topics of chit-chat had changed from video games to work, entrepreneurship and making money.

Eventually someone realised there was a person who hadn't yet talked about his future prospects. And thus, they asked me,

"Why haven't you started finding a job?"

"My mother wants me to continue studying."

"Studying? You are graduating soon! What is left to study?"

"Theology."

"What the heck is theology?"

"Christianity."

"You are going to be a Western monk? There is a person from Wenzhou in the dormitory next door. He's also a Christian. He always has a Bible by his bedside and prays while kneeling on his bed every day. Why have we never seen you with a Bible or praying? When did you become a Christian?"

"Well, maybe I'm not as religious as others."

"Can Western monks get married?"

***

Thus, my long journey of studying theology began. I felt more like part of a guerrilla group. Over a few years I went to four or five schools, met different groups of classmates and various kinds of teachers, and read all sorts of books.

The Christian identity was becoming increasingly essential in my life. If I had to label myself, I would definitely say: 'Christian'!

However, there was another identity that was vital in my life, too, so much so that I could not ignore it or escape from it. It was buried deep down in my soul: my sexuality. I am gay!

I am a Christian gay! I am a gay Christian!

I prayed and worked hard to restrain myself. I hoped God would change my sexual orientation. I once thought that if I prayed enough and restrained myself, God would of course fulfil my wish. If I knocked, God would open the door. If I asked, I would receive. God must bless me with what I sought in the name of Christ.

But it did not go the way I wanted. In front of God's door, I was like a helpless child, knocking, crying out loud. I hoped the door would be opened for me. I hoped to see God greeting me with open arms. Yet all I heard was the noise of the door shutting. The latch was locked and I was kept out.

When I calmed down enough to reflect, I came to the realisation: was it really God who was shutting the door? Or was it someone else? A person who was lenient to himself but harsh to everyone else?

Scripture says, "Now this is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and the one whom you sent, Jesus Christ."

What is separating us from the love of Christ? Is it the division of denominations? Is it the division between the open and underground church communities? Is it the Three-Self Official Church and the House Churches? Is it the division between Evangelicalism and Fundamentalism? Is it the tradition? The Magisterium? Or is it sexual orientation?

Christ has saved us from the yoke of sin. But why do some people still succumb to the deadly law and treat their brethren with that spirit-killing rule?

What counts as a sin? Doesn't the scripture say that "there is no condemnation for those who are in Jesus Christ"? Who is to say that I am not in Jesus Christ? Who else wants to judge my sin? Isn't it meaningless to argue the order of logic?

I once thought, if I were not gay, would I still be myself? My homosexual identity and orientation are deeply rooted in my life. I can only be complete with my homosexuality. My current self is gay. If my future self were changed, how would my future self be related to my current self? He would be a different person. Would that person be what I wish to be, what God wants me to be?

In the midst of constant struggle, I graduated with a degree in theology.

After graduation, I served in the Catholic Church. For those working normal jobs, I am not young. But within the clergy, I am still a beginner. There is still a long path ahead in my life. I still have lots of people to meet, lots of words to say. I believe God will lead me through all of this.

He who waits for God must not be ashamed. Life continues, and my story continues. Every gay Christian's story plays out every day. Although there is suffering, this briefest and lightest suffering will become our heaviest and eternal glory.

Loving People Like You

Pablo, Hebei

Hello everyone, I am Pablo. I am at present in the Lion City in the north, on a business trip. Today is the fourth Sunday of Lent. Like most Christians, I went to Sunday Mass this morning. Last night, I watched Leslie Cheung's *Farewell My Concubine* and slept very late, so this morning I was groggy. The Mass was at 8.30 am. Having the wrong time in mind, I arrived at the Church at 9 am and the priest was already delivering the homily. It was a pity. Therefore, I went to another Mass in the afternoon, thank God: maybe He still wants me to spend an hour with him. When the Mass was over, I attended the adoration of the Eucharist and was strongly moved.

Concerning love, everyone may have an image of the perfect other half in their hearts, no matter whether one is straight or gay. The image of the other half is absolutely perfect there, but my other half has really appeared... Let me introduce him first. I have known him for years, but our relationship was always lukewarm. However, recently, I have completely changed my understanding of him. Two people love each other, from companionship through parting, misunderstanding, and even contradiction. Love runs through every moment and it turns ordinary times into fascinating moments. He is so wise and intelligent, and his academic qualifications are beyond a doubt: much better than me. He is profound and cultured, belonging to the cool but elegant abstinent type, unlike me. He is also a perfect score for me. He knows how to make me happy. He is not rich but not poor: at least he has more money than me and there would be no problem for him to support me. But of course, I am not dependent on him. His appearance is not very outstanding, while my appearance is pretty good. That's enough for us to be a pair. He also has enough patience to tolerate my ignorance, enough

love to accept my deficiencies. I don't know how to praise him; he is just very, very good. We love each other, really enjoying the relationship and I never had such feelings before. He loves me far more than I love myself. Sometimes I am such a jerk that I behave badly towards him, and even hurt him deeply. But he loves me so much, he even sacrifices his dignity. He loves me to the point of lowering himself. At times I drove him away for no reason, but he still followed me, because he loved me. No matter how bad I am, he loves me like that. If I had known him earlier, I would have tried my best to make myself better and more like him. If I had discovered earlier that he was already by my side, I would not have been confused for so many years. If I had known him earlier, I would definitely cherish more what I have. I want to sing him a song, a song that people sing when proposing marriage: "I've finally got you. It's so lucky that I did not give up... I've finally got you when I almost missed you."

Now at this moment, what should I do? How long will this state last? I'm afraid that I could make mistakes and hurt him completely. But I firmly believe that his love for me will not change. After all that, do you want to know him? Then just replace "him" with "Him."[1]

The recent change began with a love story. After seeing a few episodes of a video, I started reading the original novel. Normally I never finish reading a thick novel, but there I was reading one for several days, even overnight. I was obsessed with the description of the love between the two protagonists in the plot. Their love could be so intense but not mediocre, so that I was under the influence of the novel for a long time. After that, when I later looked at pictures on the internet that once had fascinated me, there was a sense of disgust, and my inner voice told me: "I need love, not these."

Moreover, this is not just a temporary thought...

"I am my beloved's, and his desire is toward me" (Song 7:10). The Song of Songs[2] describes how the bride gets sick because of love. The

---

[1] Unlike the gender-oriented 'he' and 'she', Church literature usually uses 'He' when referring to God, indicating that God is genderless. But Jesus is the Son incarnate in a male form. Most of the time he is referred to as 'he', while some documents use the capitalised 'He'.

[2] A book in the Old Testament which has wonderful poems that describe love. The

Church is the bride of Jesus. What about me and Jesus? The relationship of love, the relationship between the bride and the groom. Re-examining my belief, I examine my relationship with Jesus in faith, and examine my definition of the Jesus I love.

Jesus is the Lord, the true God, and He loves us all. Pope Benedict XVI in his encyclical *God is Love*[3] explains the different dimensions of love, and even openly mentioned *eros*. In this case, it was not to talk about sex but to say that our relationship with Jesus is not limited to man's worship of God, but could also be a relationship between lovers, and the true experience is indeed like that. Jesus is not a harsh judge, not a tyrant. During my schooling, I was caught up in some confusion, like the heresy of Jansenism. I was afraid of going on trial, with fear of the future, and felt a state of narrowness. Thinking back, I would not have been afraid if I had realised earlier that Jesus is the one who loves me. What I need is love, not other things. In today's Mass, I was grateful to Jesus for giving me the ability to refuse temptation. However, I thought again: if my refusal is not out of love for Jesus, there is no value in it.

People often say that they don't know how to pray, how to worship, and even how to love. But when we can realise that we have a relationship with Jesus, every difficulty is resolved.

Regarding the desire of human nature, I never slandered sex. After I fell in love, it seems that I stepped into the threshold of asexuality. The so-called desire is so weak in the face of love. Maybe I am crazily in love, I feel that having Him in love, nothing is a problem. Freely I receive, freely I give. You said that you believe in Jesus. Do you really know the person who you say you believe in?

Church projects onto these poems the love between God and man. The Trappists in the Middle Ages wrote many wonderful books that commented on the Song of Songs.

3 *God is Love* (*Deus Caritas Est*) is the first encyclical of Pope Benedict XVI. The encyclical has 42 sections in about 75 pages. It is divided into two parts. The first part, 'The Unity of Love in Creation and in Salvation History', is divided into five chapters, analysing the meaning of love from theological and philosophical perspectives. It mainly focuses on analysis of the two kinds of love that appear in Greek: *eros* and *agape* and correspond to charity in the Christian faith. The second part is entitled 'Caritas: The Practice of Love by the Church as a Community of Love'. This section has six chapters that discuss how Church groups should put charity into action.

Lord, It Is Wonderful for Us to Be Here[1]

Xiao Lu, Hangzhou

Dreams come back, the oriole sings. All around is a scene that stirs the mind. I was standing at the small courtyard in the inner courtyard. The incense has burned out, leaving only the smoke. I threw the unwoven embroidered thread aside. Why did I feel again the same emotion that touched me last year?[2] The melodious Kunqu song accompanied me while I unfolded my memory—a memory that seemed like ripples swirling into the depths that drew in the footprints on my life's path. Today is the day of 'heavy snow' of the lunar calendar and also the Feast of the Immaculate Conception. I hope that the Immaculate Virgin Mary will accompany me.

I was born in a primitive old town in Jiangnan (on the southern bank of the Yangtze River) in the late 1980s. Since my youth, I have known that my ancestors had been merchants doing trading. At its peak, our family had dozens of acres of good farmland and two shops. Full-time workers, maids and nannies packed two round tables at every meal. My ancestors gave importance to commercial transactions and neglected education. After the war years and the Cultural Revolution, our business and properties disappeared into nothing, surviving only in family chitchat during meals.

My mother resigned from work after I was born to take care of me. My childhood was always spent with my mother, while my father's role

[1] Matthew 17:4.

[2] A verse from *The Peony Pavilion* (牡丹亭), a romantic tragicomic play written by Tang Xianzu in 1598.

has just left fragmentary memories. My gender consciousness began when seeing my mother put on cosmetics. When I was in elementary school, I naturally felt that other girls and I were of the same kind. However, gender characteristics began to become apparent at that time, and with general knowledge learned from my classmates, I began to feel attracted to my female classmates.

On entering junior high school, in the biology class, our teacher let us learn sex education by ourselves. The teacher said to raise a hand if there was any question. If not, then we were reading on our own. Parents are naturally discreet on this subject, just reminding me not to read pornographic material and not to be too intimate with female students. All other sexual information came from legends spread among my classmates. As the new millennium was approaching, the internet was introduced quietly into the town. Internet cafes became our entertainment venue, and there I found my first gay website, which had many obscene photos. My desire was like a wild horse out of control. At that time, I discovered my first gay netizen. That made me understand that there was such a group of people present in the town. But I was still repelled by homosexuality and absolutely did not believe that I was one.

When I was in high school, I even fell in love with a netizen that I only knew through a photo. I had never met the real person, even when we broke up. I find it very funny and laughable now. It may have been the photo of a certain movie star that I saw at that time. When the college entrance examination was over, still an immature person, I encountered my first love. At that time, there were many theoretical experiences in those G movies, but I never dared to try. My mind began to distinguish my sexual orientation and I silently told myself that it was only for fun.

Failing the college entrance examination forced me to go to a city nicknamed 'the stove'. At that time, the word 'corrupted female' had become a common term among college students. And my attraction to homosexuality also grew at this time. But my struggle with sexual orientation failed. I fell in love with a boy in the same dormitory. But after a short period of two months, we felt awkward and had to change bedrooms.

Therefore, I searched and found social media platforms such as gay-dating sites, gay QQ groups, etc. I was as curious as a cat to sneak

through the door of desire. At this juncture, God sent me a call. I received an evangelisation leaflet on the train. It reminded me of the icon of Jesus in my grandparents' room and the stories of Jesus that my grandparents told me when I was small. So I began to search for the information about Jesus online. The next day, I went to the door of the Catholic Church and saw the Blessed Mary in the Marian grotto looking down on me with a gentle gaze. I was baptised at Easter that year. The priest told me that baptism meant saying goodbye to the old self and receiving a new life. I began to participate in Bible study. What impressed me was that Jesus said, according to John's Gospel, "It is not you that have chosen me, but I that have chosen you." Yes, Jesus chose me when I was born and regarded me as his treasure. After that, I participated enthusiastically in many church activities. I also learned to pray the Rosary. When I encountered particularly difficult moments, I would recite the Rosary and feel help from the Blessed Mother. Indeed, in prayer, I can meet God.

After graduating from college, I returned to my hometown. But the primitive town had given way to a modern city before my eyes. It is often said that people easily get lost in vanity. I am not an exception. Beastly desire, in a hedonistic coat, pounced on me. My faith was forgotten and left inside the dust-covered Bible on the bedside. Although I went to Mass every Sunday superficially, it did not keep Jesus in my heart. Then during a confession in the Month of the Souls in Purgatory, Jesus told me through a priest: "You must avoid sinfulness and lust. No matter what sin one commits, it is outside the body. But it is an offense to the body if one is unchaste. Your body was originally bought at a high price, so be sure to use your body to glorify God." The priest told me that our body is the sanctuary of God, "It is very holy, so don't tarnish God's sanctuary because of an urge of desire. If the devil comes knocking, let Jesus open the door."

I watched some videos about *tongqi* (the wife of a gay person)[3] on

[3] Editor's note: Many gay men get married to heterosexual women out of pressure, and most of them conceal the truth. Their wives are called *tongqi* (wife of a homosexual man). Correspondingly, a heterosexual man who has married a gay woman is called *tongfu*. Chinese society has deep-rooted family traditions, and many gay Chinese have no choice but to live a deceitful married life. Because the situation is complicated,

Weibo. I also reached the age of marriage and my parents arranged many blind dates for me. At that time, I was already sure of my sexual orientation, and I didn't want to deceive the other person. I didn't want to see one more pitiful *tongqi* in the world.

Getting around, I found out that gay people could still have a form of marriage. Through an introduction by a friend, I met a lesbian. We developed from acquaintance to mutual understanding and intimacy, and finally we got married. Our marriage was no different from an ordinary one. The wedding was grand and solemn. We exchanged views on marriage when we met. In terms of marriage and family responsibilities, we think that we are not different from straight people. What is special is that we both know each other better, and even know the deepest secrets in our hearts. We are equally happy being filial to each other's parents. I remember the Bible says: "Ask and it will be given to you; search and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you" (Matthew 7:7). Thank God, I asked God to arrange a marriage for me, and He has given me a good and strong-willed girl. There is a tacit understanding in our hearts: no matter how things change, we will stay together until the end of life.

I don't have a same-sex partner now. After work, I go to church with my lesbian wife. She is getting familiar with some prayers. In addition, on weekdays, I will use network tools such as WeChat and QQ group to share with friends from the Catholic Rainbow Group. We also recite the Rosary together on the internet and do Bible-sharing. The group also organises events for gatherings. I want to say from the bottom of my heart: Lord, it is wonderful for us to be here.

At the end of this article, I hope that through my sharing, I can offer some comfort to gay Christians in despair. We are not abandoned by God. We only have to pray with patience, God will give us the best arrangement, no matter how the arrangement comes.

---

it is hard to generalise. The editors, based on the Catholic stance on marriage, are resolutely opposed to such deceitful relationships. However, society and the Church should reflect on why gay people have to make such choices. Seen from other parts of the world, the phenomenon of *tongqi* and *tongfu* is also a characteristic of Chinese society.

Left and Right: A Straight Man Who Was Once a 'Gay'

Jiang Nan, Nanjing

About 'sex'

"Food and sex are the most basic human desires" from a metaphysical perspective, Confucius points out. Nevertheless, the discussion of sex is far less profound than the discussion of food. It is because sex not only involves privacy, but sometimes also challenges ethical concepts. For these reasons, few people would formally discuss sex. Accepting the invitation of a friend to write this article, I finally have an opportunity to properly reflect on my experience of sexuality. Recalling my past life, 'food and sex' could be described as two shadows following me closely.

My first sexual experience occurred when I was 14 years old when I had just entered adolescence. By chance, I was 'seduced' by a young neighbouring housewife and prematurely lost my virginity. I say I was 'seduced' because that housewife was a recidivist. Soon after I started going to university, she was divorced because of an extramarital affair she had with another neighbour and ended up having to remarry somewhere far away. When my peers were still discreetly circulating books with adult content, I had already become sexually experienced. The affair I had with her lasted for more than a year, and this sexual experience had a major impact on my life: on the one hand, it has become the main theme of my sexual fantasies; on the other, it influenced my aesthetic preference for women.

My second sexual experience was with a same-sex classmate during the third year in senior high school. Because of the rain, the class prefect in charge of sports stayed at my home. When we were chatting at night,

he brought up the subject of sex. With him leading, we had sex together. After two weeks, he came again to stay overnight, and we naturally had a second time together. In these two encounters, I was playing the 'pitcher' while he was playing the 'pitch' even though he was taller and stronger. According to my understanding of him, he was definitely a heterosexual. After graduating from university, he soon married a high-school classmate and had children. Nowadays he often shows off how happy his family is on the internet. I suppose he is enjoying a good life.

Judging from my sexual experience, I am indeed a minority. However, I never label myself 'bisexual' because bisexuality is not simply judged on sexual experience, but also on sexual attraction. My romantic and sexual experiences after high school all involved the opposite sex. I had no romantic desire for the same sex. Later when I was studying Psychology, I read a lot of books on sexual psychology and found out that a lot of research, including the Kinsey Reports, mentioned many people having atypical patterns in their sexual experience, and I was one of them.

About 'faith'

As early as at university, my curiosity about the Christmas festival ignited my interest in Christianity. I occasionally took part in the university fellowship, and I even professed my faith in God. However, I still had many doubts about my faith. After graduation, I got to know more about Catholicism through the introduction of a colleague, and eventually got baptised. The reason why I chose Catholicism, from a rational perspective, was because of its higher credibility. There are many religions pioneered by the sages in history, but Christianity propagated the 'incarnation' of God, who became human to allow humans to transcend their earthly life. The Crucifixion of Christ and His Resurrection were preached by his apostles, at the risk of their own lives. This testified to the truth they told. The long continuity of Catholicism for nearly 2,000 years is a credible testimony to the Christian faith.

Perhaps because I accepted Catholicism in my adulthood, the Catholic teachings on sexual ethics did not bother me much, despite many challenges. Although many people like to rationalise the existence

of sexual minorities from the perspective of biology or sociology, and this type of argument is more and more widely accepted in society, as a Christian, I prefer to use the idea of original sin to explain the reality of human sexuality.

From the perspective of original sin, once Adam and Eve had committed their 'sin', the entire creation fell into a state of disorder. To correct this disordered state was one of the reasons why God became incarnate. Of course, the main reason was God's unceasing love for humans. This disorder caused by original sin is holistic and its influence extends to all aspects of creation, including human sexuality. Various deviations from sexual ethics as well as the existence of sexual minorities are the manifestation of this disorder. Some people try to justify homosexuality and other sexual minorities by stating that homosexuality exists in other animal species as well. But this can only illustrate the reality of these sexual minorities or sexual acts. Understanding human sexuality from the perspective of religion still has its justification. At least for us believers, it is a perspective that lets us understand the world better.

About the 'act'

The word 'sin' that is used in theological discussions originally meant 'missing the mark'. This type of deviation is in fact a normal state of life, because humans and even the entire creation are suffering from the consequences of original sin, not only in terms of sexuality, but also in other aspects. However, in modern society, not many people accept this metaphysical way of explaining reality. The Catholic Church's teachings on sexual ethics are still very metaphysical, more like doctrinal declarations rather than attempts to provide concrete and effective care for the "the slave of sin" (John 8:34) from a pastoral perspective.

Given that humans are "flesh and blood" and "the slaves of sin," St Paul the Apostle described the plight of mankind in a clear manner in Chapter 7 of the Letter to the Romans: "For the good that I would, I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." Facing constant temptation is a normal state of human life. 'Food and sex' being the main desires of human beings, they are only a manifestation of the

normal aspect of sex. Many theologians have noticed that the Church's ethical teachings seem to pay too much attention to homosexuality, to the point that the general public simply equates the Church with anti-homosexuality, ignoring the Church's overall concern for human life.

Nowadays, the ethical teachings of the Church often make people see them as 'out of touch', neglecting the basic reality of human life. Although the Catholic Church cannot simply base the ethical teachings on scientific knowledge, such as modern biology and psychology, it should still maintain an open mind to these scientific understandings, because they are tools and methods for the better understanding of human beings. For example, the Church resolutely opposes the use of artificial contraception such as condoms, while in real life it is challenged by the transmission of viruses, such as HIV and Zika. The Church's opposition to same-sex marriage has met with defeats in many traditional Catholic countries such as Ireland. The emergence of these problems does not mean the Church's ethical teachings are wrong, but it does reflect the failure of its pastoral strategies.

In the 2014 Synod of Bishops with the theme of family, many bishops mentioned the "law of graduality" in ethics, that is, both virtues and vices evolve gradually and our relationship with God is not instantly achievable, rather it is a slow process that requires continuous improvement. It is said: "Don't be too severe in reproaching others for their faults; it is better to consider how much they can endure. Don't be too demanding when initiating others into righteousness; it is better to make them feel easy about keeping up" (from Hong Zicheng's 1590 book *Caigentan*). Although the Church needs to define clearly good and evil in their ethical teachings, from the perspective of pastoral care, it is not appropriate to adopt radicalism, which draws a line between good and evil and suggests that a person can only be in one or the other. The Church should be more active in guiding believers to rehabilitate and improve in order to transcend their present state.

As Saint John Paul II concretely pointed out in his *Familiaris Consortio* (1981), there is a gap between ideals and reality, and what humans need is "continuous and lasting transformation." The Catholic Catechism particularly points out that "Self-mastery is a long and exacting work... It presupposes renewed effort at all stages of life," and the

effort required can be more intense in certain periods, such as when the personality is being formed during childhood and adolescence (2342). Moreover, "chastity has laws of growth which progress through stages marked by imperfection and too often by sin" (2343). This practical care for the reality of human life reflects the kindness and gentleness of the Church. Rather than just blaming people for their faults, the Church wishes to direct them to the right path and guide them to follow the lead of the Holy Spirit, to model themselves on Jesus Christ, to live a fruitful life in this mortal world.

I Am the Ex-wife of a Gay Man, and I Defend Gay Rights

Little Teresa, Wuhan

When I was a child, I often went to the church to play. The pointed cross shone in the glow of the evening. In the twilight, people always looked up to it. The dark-coloured door kept the hustle and bustle of the secular world out of the church. Inside the church, it was always peaceful and calm. Happiness was like the flow of clear streams running through your ears and eyes. I listened to the priest reading the Bible every day, watching people praying for their fate. The stained-glass windows reflected the golden glow of the setting sun.

When I officially joined the catechism classes in 2009, this feeling grew stronger. Whenever I entered the church, I felt relaxed and happy. In January 2011, it was a chilly winter when I was hospitalised in Wuhan. I even told a visiting priest that I wanted to be a nun. The priest replied that my personality and other aspects were suitable. As long as my parents agreed, he could write a recommendation letter for me to enter a religious congregation. It was a life I longed for. In 2010, I finally realised my dream and was baptised as a Catholic, starting my quiet life as a religious faithful while the idea of being a nun was called off.

But such calmness did not last long. My parents were very traditional, and they thought I was old enough to get married. In 2011, just after the celebration of Lunar New Year, I started having blind dates at my parents' demand. Maybe the word 'arranged marriage' would be more accurate. I didn't really have any idea anyway, so I let my parents arrange the blind dates. I told my ex-husband that I was Catholic at our first meeting, so I couldn't have sex before marriage. He didn't seem to mind at all, as if marriage was merely a mission he couldn't avoid. After

a year of dating, we finally got married in May 2012. Sending off the guests, I returned to the bedroom, nervously waiting for the moment when I would become a woman. But my husband said the wedding was too exhausting and told me to go to bed early. I didn't realise something was wrong. Later when we went on our honeymoon, my husband tried to make love to me but failed. He explained that it was his first time and he had no experience. He told me things would get better.

Returning from our honeymoon, our busy life went on. We rarely talked to each other, unlike other married couples. Usually one would be watching TV while the other played computer games. I thought we were just not accustomed to living with each other. We pretended to be happy in front of friends and relatives, but when we returned home, we wouldn't talk to each other. We gradually became the closest strangers. We slept on the same bed but using separate duvets.

Finally, two months into our marriage, my husband couldn't pretend anymore. He came out to me and suggested a divorce. In July 2012, my husband told me he was gay. I was utterly shocked. 'Homosexuals' seemed to be so far away from me that they only appeared on TV and internet. I never thought it could happen in my life. When I calmed down and thought about his actions before our marriage, I managed to believe his words.

In the following days, I searched for relevant information online, starting to get to know about homosexuality. I thought it was only a psychological or neurological disorder and might be curable. I might be able to change his sexual orientation to save our marriage. After all, I longed for a loving husband and a warm family. By chance, I came across a video interview of China's first *tongqi*, Cui Yuhe. She made me realise that the community of *tongqi* has long existed in China. The more information I got, the more I was aware that sexual orientation couldn't be changed. Despair and loneliness filled my heart, and I burst into tears. Every night, helplessness and loneliness tortured me, and I had no one to talk to about this agony. But I have never hated homosexuals. I was only trying to bury my head in the sand.

Finally, we had the longest talk we had ever had since we knew each other. I got to understand the pressures, difficulties and unspeakable hardships of being gay. They were discriminated against and even

considered disgusting by the general public. My attitude towards my husband had gradually improved, especially after taking part in the Fifth Chengdu Symposium held by the PFLAG China in September 2012. It was by then I realised there are many homosexuals in the world (in the past 'homosexuality' was merely a noun to me, but now I know they are all flesh and blood). In mid-December of the same year, I finally realised that it was better to let go of each other and pursue our own happiness, rather than continuing this endless agony. We ended our loveless and hateless marriage that only lasted half a year.

I have a religious faith and a Catholic can only get married once in their lifetime. As marriage is given by God, divorce is not an option. Even if divorced, remarrying is not allowed. I have talked to our priest about my marriage. He told me that in my case, even after the divorce, God would still give me another chance to marry again.[1]

The purpose of my faith is to preach the Gospel to the world, because the Lord Jesus Christ came to the world for all of us. He once said that he came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. He did not come to be served but to serve. He was willing to die on the cross for the sins of all of us. I am the same as a child of God. I have to bear my own cross and walk with God. I do not only live for myself, but also for my faith. For this, some people do not understand why I did not show negative emotions when I learned about my husband's homosexuality. It was because I was willing to show him empathy. It was not his fault. No one is willing to walk this path. Only by truly understanding them can we help them.

Some people think that the information I share will indirectly hurt women with the same religious background, while some people with ulterior motives might even target religious women, and thus they think I cannot bring any help to other *tongqi*. I am afraid I cannot agree with this point of view. Everyone has his or her own thoughts and ways

[1] Marriage is a sacrament in Catholicism. A person can only have one legal marriage sacrament in the Church while divorce is not allowed unless there are some involuntary or other unreasonable factors in the marriage. In that case, under the framework of the Canon Law, after divorce, one can still enter another marriage and accept another marriage sacrament.

of doing things. This cannot be generalised. I just want to share my experience. Maybe another *tongqi* has experienced the same thing but did not share it. Although some of my ideas might not be comprehensive enough, I hope that they can at least help prevent certain things from happening again.

At the end of September 2012, I joined my first *tongqi* QQ chat group. In this QQ group, there were all kinds of hatred and condemnation of gay men. I was fully aware that this group was full of negative emotions and heavy grievances, and there was no positive attitude towards life. Hence, I established my own QQ group in October 2012 and opened a Weibo and a WeChat channel, and officially started to work for the community of *tongqi*. In the early stage, I was only chatting and providing consolation in the QQ group, giving *tongqi* a place to talk. With the increasing number of *tongqi*, in March 2013, I established the Tongqi Mutual Support Workshop, which is based in mainland China, aiming to prevent women from becoming *tongqi* and safeguard the rights of *tongqi*. The Workshop also promotes understanding of homosexuality and persuades the homosexuals not to enter easily into a heterosexual marriage. We also fight for the legalisation of same-sex marriage and the formulation of laws against discrimination according to sexual orientation, so as to protect heterosexuals from being deceived into a marriage with a homosexual partner. We also provide counselling for heterosexuals that have already married a homosexual partner, and advocate social inclusion and equal treatment to gays.

Getting to know more *tongqi*, it was inevitable for me to get in touch with the gay community. The gay community is also a high-risk group for AIDS, so I also started to work on AIDS prevention with the gay community. In March 2014, I left my job and went to Quanzhou alone. I joined the Castle Group and worked for a *tongqi* charity while helping with AIDS prevention with the gay population. Due to my involvement in many charities, I was unable to take up a job. Without a stable income, it has been very difficult for me to find funding for these charity activities. I was even reluctant to replace an old pair of slippers. Instead, I would take them to be repaired time and time again. Every time I went out, I would take a bus or just walk. Only on some rare occasions would I choose to take a taxi. Although it was tough, I was very glad whenever

I saw a *tongqi* that escaped from the bondage of marriage. When I was in gay clubs or gay bars promoting AIDS prevention, there was always a group of people around me asking HIV/AIDS-related questions. Seeing that more and more people were starting to pay attention to HIV/AIDS, I feel that my efforts were worthwhile.

Since 2014, I have organised and taken part in various activities. The first one was on August 2. I held a street advocacy event—Marriage-seeking for *tongqi* on Chinese Valentine's Day—in Quanzhou's Lingxiu Tiandi. The second was to participate in the Hong Kong Gay Parade on November 8. The third was two interviews with Hong Kong Phoenix Panoramic Eyeshot and Charity China respectively on December 16. The fourth was on Chinese New Year 2015, when I accepted a filming request from Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) for a *tongqi* documentary. I also organised a street advocacy campaign for *tongqi* in the evening of the Lantern Festival. I hope that through these activities, more people will be aware of the *tongqi* community, and that they can also alert more homosexuals not to enter easily into a heterosexual marriage, destroying the happiness of an innocent woman (or man) for a lifetime.

On the Chinese Valentine's Day in 2014, the news about my street advocacy event (marriage-seeking for *tongqi* on Chinese Valentine's Day) in Quanzhou was widespread, and my fellow church mates in Quanzhou and Wuhan all knew about it. The priest of the Quanzhou church tried to reach me for a talk for several days. I was upset and worried. I did not know how he thought about it. Would he support my work, or would he oppose like the priests in Wuhan? I felt very embarrassed, so I asked a friend of mine to go with me. When he first talked to me, he was very sensitive about the topic of homosexuality and would rather avoid it. The second time we talked, it was much better. This year, I brought the director of the RTHK programme with me. We filmed some footage about my religious life. We also talked with the priest and found that he had changed some of his views on homosexuality.

Every time I went back to the church in Wuhan, the priest of Hankou always criticised me, "Why are you still doing this work? You have to live a normal life! You can't do this!" But our Pope Francis has changed his attitude towards the homosexual community. In the past, the Church rejected and refused to recognise them, but now they advocate

pastoral care for the homosexuals. This change has moved me a lot. The legalisation of same-sex marriage in France and Ireland also astounded me. After all, France and Ireland are the most traditional Catholic countries in the world. If both France and Ireland can get through this barrier, I hope that the Church will one day recognise this reality.

All of us are created by God. If God created such a community—homosexuals—He will not reject them. If He rejected them, it would be in contradiction with His own creation. Jesus came to the world to proclaim love, and He did not reject anyone. I sometimes chatted with the priest in Wuhan, and he refuted me with the story of Sodom. I don't know why Sodom was destroyed. Later, I also told the priest that although the city of Sodom was destroyed by angels, we did not live in the era at that time. We do not know what kind of social background it had. The priest said that the Church does not reject homosexuality, but opposes same-sex behaviour. He believes that the homosexual community should abstain from sex. But how? Food and sex are part of human needs. You can't force others to abstain from sex. On this aspect, I can only discuss in-depth with the priest in Quanzhou.

A withered flower does not devastate the whole Spring. A fallen star does not darken the entire starry sky. A failed marriage does not ruin my lifelong happiness. I hope that society can be more aware of *tongqi*, a group that is even more concealed than homosexuals. I strongly support all *tongqi* to leave their current unfortunate marriage behind to enter another happy marriage and face their life with a smile. At the same time, I hope that society and the Church will offer gays a more harmonious and tolerant atmosphere, so that they can be brave enough to just be themselves.

Hong Kong

The 'Commandment' of Love

Paul, Hong Kong

Who am I? Between this self and that self, can only one live? What is the true meaning of living out Christ and living out the true self? All these questions have been hovering in my mind since I was in high school.

I have been exposed to Christianity since I was a child. I studied in Protestant and Catholic schools respectively. In my impression, God is full of grace and beyond all love. Although I was not raised in a Christian family, I was deeply moved by God's blessing and longed to know and search for faith. In high school, I started to study catechism to pursue the true meaning of life. At the same time, my search for faith was also the beginning of knowing myself, knowing what I believe and what values I hold. Yet, the process of understanding oneself is full of contradictions. I think life might be a kind of continuous collection of uncertainties fluctuating among contradictions.

In my high school, I was excellent in both conduct and academic performance, and active in the Catholic community and in many student organisations. Teachers, classmates, and even my classmates' parents liked me very much. They sometimes even jokingly said they wanted me to be their son or son-in-law. I was also proud of my performance and achievements. But behind all that, I seemed to be avoiding looking into or thinking about some part of myself. I found that I had been building my cheerful, brilliant and positive self, but ignoring and burying my feelings and desires for persons of the same sex. Sex was as close as our body and our thoughts, but also too far away to fully grasp. In the atmosphere of the Church, I saw sex as the gift of God, but what about same-sex attraction? Faced with the contradiction in my heart that I loved both Jesus and people of the same sex, I learned to suppress everything. Entering the university I turned a new page and started on a

journey to explore and understand my beliefs and values.

Renewal

During my college years, I had the opportunity to listen to the stories of gay people and learned about homosexuality in class, yet I still could not link myself to the word 'gay'. After all, 'homosexuality' was full of taboos and was also tied to many negative stereotypes and labels. In moments of helplessness, I began to question: "Why does God not like those who love the same sex?" "What is love?" "What is family?" "Isn't it treachery if I am with a boy but abandon him to date a girl due to homosexuality?" I was extremely confused. The dispute between the 'angel' and the 'devil' kept spinning in my mind. Feeling split in my mind, I went to the university's counselling center. During the counselling, I discovered the knot I was still unable to solve was my belief: the love for Jesus.

Knowing that my own knot lay in faith, I decided to confess to the priest chaplain in the university, telling him all the thoughts and feeling that I had buried in my heart. In my confession I cried. I trembled. I was scared, too. After a long silence, the priest reiterated the stance of the Holy See, but also pointed out that there were different voices and opinions in the Church, saying that it was still a controversial subject. He stressed that God is love and forgiveness, and said "If you can't enter heaven I don't want to go either." I cried. My "eyes were opened" like St Paul the Apostle: standing in front of me was an old man in a white robe, opening his arms with a sincere smile and receptive eyes. Was that not Jesus Christ? I kept crying… This was an unprecedented confession and self-reform. It was the greatest renewal and evolution on the journey of my faith since I had been baptised.

Sometimes questioning one's own faith and belief is a sign not of a lack of faith but rather of the deepest concern for one's faith and values. It is through questioning that we make ourselves clearer and more understood, and make our faith deeper and more stable. It was no coincidence that I chose 'Paul' as my Christian name, as St Paul had been the first Biblical figure I knew, and my conversion to Jesus had been very similar to what happened to him. St Paul kept questioning Christ even as the strong light hurt his eyes; later, however, he was enlightened and healed. He became the extraordinary apostle to the Gentiles.

There were undeniably moments that I became blind again, especially when I thought I had already fully understood and practiced the teachings of Jesus after reading some scriptural passages repeatedly. Even if I could recite many Biblical verses accurately, I was still blind if I only abided by cold and dead rules and laws. Take this verse as an example, "I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love one another. This is how all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:34-35). This seemingly simple verse is fascinating if you take the initiative to connect it with your life. In my search and facing the journey of my faith, I heard the everlasting 'commandment' of Jesus Christ: unconditional love. How could I, as a Catholic youth, live out Christ?

Love and spirituality

As a gay person myself, I realised the importance of self-acceptance and self-compassion. The social discrimination and stigma faced by gay people can make us feel confused, helpless, disappointed, and even lead us to self-judgment. But Jesus' resurrection was, for me, a kind of calling to restore hope, to reconnect with my true self, and to accept my whole self without covering up. Observing my breath going in and out, my chest expanding and contracting, I felt my own nature. I heard in peace: Thank you for taking care of me, as if Jesus was speaking softly to me. Stigma was exactly the Stigmata of Jesus, wasn't it? When we learn how to take good care of ourselves, we can—learning from the oppression faced by the LGBTQI+ community—also discern the injustice and oppression faced by other vulnerable groups in society.

I believe that 'human being' is not just the lifeless label of a compartment in a cabinet for storing Chinese medicine, but a being intertwined with multiple identities, personalities and values. For me, many things in our life are not just black and white. A man being human could be a combination of an angel and a demon. Without a doubt God is everywhere, living in the relationships among different people. If we can recognise Jesus Christ in people we meet every day, treat the most marginalised people in our society as Jesus' tabernacle and the temple of the Holy Spirit, face the fears that we project on others, and take the

initiative to welcome and embrace those experiences and values that are different from ours, our lives will surely be diverse and dynamic.

An Adventure to Love, Happy to Love: Reflection on the Holy Week Liturgies

Joan of Arc, Hong Kong

I used to think that I would never get over my ex-boyfriend. Falling in love with him was the most unforgettable relationship in my lifetime. The pain of breaking up with him had almost taken my life. The deeper the love became, the worse the pain of parting. The first few days I soaked myself in tears. Eventually my body could not bear the depression and I fell seriously ill. I was fortunate to have close friends of the same sex who cared for and supported me. One of them who knew me well was considerably more caring. I came to an important discovery inadvertently: the emotional connection and support between a woman and another woman can certainly compete with that between a woman and a man.

My world has changed

Even though I was still attracted to some men, I began to realise that I felt differently toward some women. I started to face those feelings of love. My world was getting more and more colourful.

I did not even notice that I had a special feeling toward a woman whom I just met. Her straightforward and unrestrained manner attracted me. I felt relaxed and delighted even though it was only chit-chat. Bit by bit I became excited and fascinated. Once during a conversation with her, I was surprised to feel my heart begin to pump and bump vigorously. When the conversation ended, I asked myself why my heart was still beating like that. I realised that she had something that attracted me. I was unprepared to experience this. All this came too suddenly and too fast.

Staring at the blue sky, the white clouds, and the flowers swinging in the breeze. Grasses and trees grow luxuriantly; the breeze caresses my face gently.

All creatures praise the Lord for His wondrous deeds, revealing the Creator's boundless love:

We give thanks to God with all our hearts, to see the Earth filled with warmth.

We will sing aloud together today, God, Your love is like the ocean.

O God! You are the spring of my life.

You have created my body. You have breathed to rekindle my soul.

My heart is filled with joy.

All creations grow in prosperity. Who does not thrive best in showing its uniqueness? I appreciate and like each and every person, be it a him or a her. That is simply because he is he and she is she. Everyone has their own unique beauty and we are all the creations of God. O God, how beautiful and great it all is!

Wrapped in loneliness

However, this amazing discovery also troubled me for a while. Did I really like women? My head was filled with question marks. Surely not! But how could I explain my heart beating, my nervous agitation? Oh my God. My mind can lie to itself that I did not like her, but it could not cheat my body and my heart!

I had to admit it even as I kept denying it. But I always had many doubts and dared not admit the truth. Fortunately, after consulting with some gay friends, and having explored and sorted out relationships with female friends in the past bit by bit, I came to learn that I was close to being bisexual. But this new understanding still failed to fully allay my fears and worries.

I was really scared to tell others about this emerging understanding, thinking that all would be fine if I did not confirm it. But this denial of my true experience really made me very uncomfortable. After all, I wasn't doing anything wrong and it was a beautiful discovery. I really

wanted to share with my friends and get their understanding. I was aware also of the danger of being strangled by homophobic ideas and the thoughts of people who were against homosexuality. I had to bravely embrace my beautiful side!

I tried to share my new understanding with my best friends. Some of them understood, but some doubted it. This kind of questioning denied my experience and occasionally made me fall into self-doubt, too.

Such misunderstanding and rejection put such pressure on me that I did not dare to disclose my understanding to my family even though their acceptance and support mattered a lot to me. In particular, my mother once told me with shame and contempt that she had seen a relative's son being intimate with another man in the street. If I told my parents and my family, they might not be able to understand or accept, and might even feel ashamed of me because they had always thought that it was the norm for a man to marry a woman and a woman to marry a man. All of my relatives also held this idea. I could not just tell my family casually!

In the same way, in the workplace, I felt I could never let my colleagues or supervisors know about my new self-understanding, for carelessness could render me a blackmail target and vulnerable to being kicked away under an austerity policy.

The Church becomes my oppressor

Although I met lots of good and devoted Catholics from my childhood onwards, the Church defined homosexuality as sin, and thus I could not disclose my identity. Were it disclosed accidentally, someone would probably preach the dogma and stand up to criticise me.

After some homosexuals disrupted—but not attacked—a Mass in progress in the cathedral,[1] the Church began to pay attention to homosexuality and invited foreign experts to give lectures. I still remember how I felt when I attended the first of these lectures. It kept warning of a big conspiracy in the LGBTQI+ movement. My mind at

[1] North American Chinese Society for the Study of Gender and Sexuality, 'Hong Kong gay rights activists rushed into the Catholic church to protest,' *Pink All Over the World*, August 25, 2003. http://csssm.aibai.org/155gb.htm#3

that time was filled with one participant's question: "What views do homosexuals have of those claims? Do we have any homosexuals here? Why don't we ask them how they feel?" The lectures simply ignored this, refusing to consider what homosexuals thought.

There were one or two times when the faithful, discussing homosexuality, just kept saying that it was abnormal and endangered the family and society. They had no care or consideration for the situation of homosexuals. I felt it would be very hard to explain myself to anyone in the Church. I could only remain alert and careful.

The Catholic Church did not accept homosexuality, but I still found I needed to know more about it and conducted some research. I began my exploration, starting from reading psychology books and attending public forums, going on to consulting Church teachings and seeking out biblical explanations and discussions. Finally, I came to understand that human history was full of diverse gender and sexual tendencies, and that the homosexuality of today could be said to be totally different from the past forms condemned in the Bible. At present, love in same-sex relationships is in no way inferior to that in heterosexual relationships. Homosexual relationships can also be in harmony and cooperate with each other, and last forever.

What was most disappointing and frustrating for me was the Church's persistently homophobic attitude and remarks. They really showed no love or concern for gay people. There was no fellowship, only judgment.

I also gradually lost enthusiasm for going to church. Being busy with work and frequent overtime was already making me physically and mentally exhausted and going back to the parish made me feel an indescribable sense of loneliness, so I often found excuses not to go to the church.

Fearing being denied, I hid myself away. I dared not walk out from the shadow of being misunderstood and rejected. I experienced an unprecedented loneliness. Only my homosexual friends and the small number of friends who accepted me could give me support.

My life since then had an intangible burden weighing heavily on my back. I could not put it down. I felt like I was facing a knot that can never be untied, promising endless grief.

When feeling unhappy in the past, I liked to go adore the Eucharist to meet Jesus, which was like catching up with an old friend to have a meal. But during those days, I went instead to the three big trees in a park as I felt no seats welcomed me at the church. The three trees acted as the Lord and my parents. I loved to lean against them to feel support and protection from God. Those trees also became my parents for me to talk to and give me comfort and courage.

A song resonated in my heart:

> Yahweh is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
> In grassy meadows he lets me lie.
> He leads me to restore my spirit.
> He guides me in paths of saving justice.
> Even were I to walk in a ravine as dark as death I should fear no danger,
> for you are at my side.

The pleasant warm sun shone through the tree shade. It shone upon me like God's love. No one could stop it. It had to find its way to me and warmed my heart.

I say who I am

After trying to accept the true me, I wasn't able to start dating the one who had made my heart pant like a deer. The next days were not easy. Just because you could also love a female didn't mean you could then love others. As in earlier times when I had been single after a breakup I was not sure whether I would ever meet the right person in my life. Moreover, homosexuals are a minority. To find the person who was meant for me, to fall in love and become companions for life was not easy.

Claiming to be a homosexual was not easy and bisexuality also provoked suspicion in homosexual circles—did she really love women? Or did she still love men? I always felt that 'bisexuality' could not fully describe my mind. I really liked both men and women, and even though my desire to fall in love with a woman had been ignited, the most important thing for me was to love a 'person' from my heart, not the gender of the person!

If I simply said that I am a homosexual, I would immediately be

understood as a lesbian who only likes women. But I am not exactly like that. Bisexuality seems just to be a convenient definition but did not fully describe my mind. In short, the discovery was beautiful but at the same time also annoying!

In fact, I prefer to feel and experience love in an ordinary way rather than thinking about whose sexual organs to connect with. I long to meet the one who has a strong arm for my head to rest on and for me to nestle in, with whom I can talk, as Christ, my intimate friend, who has always been with me and gives me His arm when I need it.

I was forced to walk with my cross

The Church has become more and more homophobic and less caring in its response to homosexuality. The review of the Domestic Violence Ordinance was regarded as a 'trap', a trick to change the definition of marriage. What was worse was the denial of the very existence of discrimination against homosexuals and therefore opposition to legislation designed to protect those suffering discrimination. This made me angry. Claiming her love for homosexuals, the Church was in fact the one who most frequently criticises homosexuals. It was not only hypocritical but was bullying homosexuals whilst disguising it as love.

I did not deny that heterosexual marriage could be of great value. But they kept talking about the 'deficiency' of homosexuality—that we could not give birth as opposite-sex couples do, devaluing and despising the genuine love between homosexuals, and deliberately exaggerating negative situations. I was tired of these statements from the beginning, and gradually stopped listening. I felt it was more and more unfair since other people spoke, but we were never able to speak for ourselves. The most difficult for me to accept was that these were people who believed in God. How could they demonstrate such a lack of love and compassion? They disrespect without even giving a reason. They are not just inconsiderate; they really do not care about you. They constantly attack homosexuals with the Church's teachings.

Under such circumstances, to be a Catholic homosexual is a dead end. Facing this oppression homosexuals have to take up their cross. My cross is not my sexual orientation; it is other people's convictions and discrimination that crucify me!

How did it happen that one day I did not want to be a Catholic anymore? This Church filled with vain and superficial love greatly reduced my devotion in the Mass. It was better not to participate in the Mass if your soul was absent, better to do spiritual exercises on my own and converse with God directly. At least He understood and accepted me.

It really broke my heart that the big family of the Church was no longer a home to me. She[2] used to be my warm haven, but was now a battlefield with hundreds of thousands of arrows piercing my heart. My heart ached but She could no longer listen and understand. Sometimes I asked myself: what have I done wrong? Why should I face that kind of ordeal? I keep on thinking about Her good but could not endure the harm She did to me.

Faced with the Church's teachings criticising homosexuality as a sin, on the lonely and helpless road of homosexuality, I would not be able to stand no matter how strong I was! I had to find a way to get equal dignity for myself. If I could not get it in the Church, at least I could fight for it in society.

Praying in the darkness, I could not hear God's response. There was only endless darkness and silence. I asked God, "Where are you? Why can't I feel you? Do you still care about my pain? Why is there only darkness and loneliness?" I cried floods of helpless tears.

Then a Taizé chant suddenly sounded in my heart, "Our darkness is never darkness in your sight: the deepest night is clear as the day-light." I lost my original dependence and entered the darkness. God, like the darkness and silence, tightly embraced me. Darkness was no longer just darkness, but light and God. God heard my grief, mourned for me with silence, and expressed his heartache in the darkness. The darkness was full of His love and presence!

The dark night of my soul accompanied me through the long wandering years of my life.

---

[2] Catholics like to refer the Church as feminine, for example, the Church as 'Mother Church', the 'Bride of Christ' and so on, which are similar to 'motherland'.

Pope Francis who never judges homosexuals

After Pope Francis' installation, he redefined the attitude of the Church toward gay Catholics—if a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge? It seemed to be a ray of light in the dark.

After that, I began to hear that some Church members no longer made judgments of gays and were willing to sympathise with them and recognise their needs for equal protection as they faced discrimination. However, at the same time the shouting of the hypocrites became louder; the more some said not to judge, the more they pronounced homosexuals guilty. In their eyes, there was only sin. They never saw people with the eyes of love. There was no medication that could cure their sickness.

Just as God would forgive the sins of a city because of the appearance of a single righteous person, I decided to try returning to the church. I chose Holy Week to start to rejoin the life of the church because the commemoration of the suffering of Jesus was of special significance to me who carried my cross as well.

The Lord's Supper

One of the special parts of the Mass of the Lord's Supper of Holy Thursday is feet washing. The celebrant who presided over the Mass washes the feet of several faithful, following Jesus who had washed the Apostles' feet. As I was watching this time, Jesus' parting words to the disciples at the Last Supper came to my mind. "No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends... I call you friends… My command to you is to love one another." (John 15:13, 15b, 17)

Lord Christ under what circumstances did you wash your disciples' feet? Lord Jesus, when you were about to endure suffering, you not only put aside your role as master to become a servant to wash your masters' feet, but you also invited the disciples who had been with you for a few years to develop a deeper relationship by calling them not disciples but friends. It seemed that being in trouble made you reflect on practising the mission of the kingdom of heaven not only through orders or instructions given by a master to his servants or by a master to an apprentice, but rather through equality and mutual loyalty to each other.

Lord Jesus, when you laid down the position of master, you became a maid to serve tenderly and became a woman with delicate feelings. When you put down the burden of gender, you faced those who harmed you and your friends' betrayal with selfless love, you made me find the strength to continue to love in the face of persecution, betrayal, and desertion!

Appearing suddenly in my mind was the friendship between Hong Kong superstar Leslie Cheung, nicknamed Gor Gor (elder brother) and his lover Tangtang. This year's anniversary of Gor Gor's death just happened to have fallen in Holy Week. I read some online memorials to recall their love. When Gor Gor realised that he could not escape from the paparazzi, he deliberately took his lover's hand as a gesture to declare amid those threats and homophobic slanders the kind of love that they would hold on to forever, even if it meant sacrificing his career, reputation and everything… It needed the boldness of a martyr!

Their exquisite, deep and determined love was like those in romantic novels, but lived out in real life. It was what many lovers had dreamed of. The shackles of society and the criticism of others made their relationship even more treasured, sincere and true.

At first, Gor Gor's farewell to show business was supposed to be a sacrifice for his lover to live together in Canada. Later, he returned to Hong Kong and continued his varied performing arts career, which made me uncertain and curious. I guessed it was not just Gor Gor leaving his performing arts career to protect Tangtang, but probably that Tangtang hoped that his lover would be able to be himself and do what he liked. It was no wonder Gor Gor described Tangtang as God's gift. What kind of love was this? It really touched me! O, Lord Jesus, such warm and embracing emotions were nourished between you and your beloved disciples and I would continue to nurture with you the love between us.

Lord Christ, I felt sadness and sorrow for the passing away of Gor Gor. Please bless all the lovers in the world! Regardless of our sexual orientation or sexual identity, we became your disciples with a love that makes us willing to sacrifice for others. Please accept our offering and sacrifice!

Lord Jesus, tonight's feet-washing rite re-enacted the spirit of serving each other that you taught your disciples. You broke the traditions of the

ritual of the Jewish feast, serving as a female servant to wash disciples' feet and serving food. Your extraordinary acts seemed too familiar, their form appearing in the life of Gor Gor!

Returning to the stage, in Gor Gor Live in Concert 1997 he wore high-heel shoes and put on lipstick, posing with a charming gesture but preserving partial male costume. In another series of concerts he gave in 2000, he appeared with waist-long hair, which sometimes was bundled as a bun. He sometimes also dressed in a short skirt, but simultaneously revealed arm muscles and a moustache. These deliberately androgynous appearances broke the established pattern of gender roles, as if he was not only himself on the virtual stage, but also an extraordinary performance of 'coming out of the closet' itself. What Gor Gor as a public figure did was to put the belittling interpretations of sexual minorities' bodies and gender on the beautiful and admirable stage, making redress.

Although this extraordinary performance was not appreciated by the local media, he took advantage of his status to take risks to uphold rights for himself and for sexual minorities. I believed that his reward was no longer on earth!

Lord Christ, I knew that you were like me. When seeing Gor Gor's extraordinary behaviour, the redress he received and the sacrifice he made, those who criticised him might not understand but you surely deeply appreciated his pursuit of righteousness. Be mindful of his sincere and deep love for his lover, please receive his soul.

Lord Jesus, thank you for allowing me to recall your friendship and love in my distress, something I did not deserve. Please continue to wash my feet! Thank you for your extraordinary behaviour, which becomes the help and nourishment for us the sexual minority. What a great grace indeed!

The commemoration of the Passion of Christ

The liturgy of Good Friday re-enacts the scenes of Jesus' sufferings—being betrayed, falsely arrested, tortured severely and imprisoned unjustifiably with invalid defence, the torture of carrying the cross, street procession, collapsing, being teased and mocked, forced nakedness, the agony of being nailed, separation with beloved family, the most profound feeling of rejection, the forgiveness of the world until he uttered his last breath.

"My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me! …How have I offended you? Answer me!"[3]

Lord Christ, my heart was heavy. Your suffering not only witnessed the autocratic tyranny mutilating the people, but also made me wonder at this great love...

Lord, did you see how heavy my cross was? Why did I have to bear it? Those who tried to judge homosexuals kept nailing me! Lord, you knew I love you, but why should I bear such a cross?

Lord Christ, was your cross not heavy too? Why did you have to suffer from this kind of suffering? You loved the world, but the world crucified you! You were so foolish since these people were not worthy of you to suffer for them! Even if you died a hundred times, they were all still so stubborn! It would be better for you to look for righteous people and suffer for them! Lord, your love really makes me confused and speechless!

Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone wants to be a follower of mine, take up his cross." (Matthew 16:24). Were you saying this to righteous people?! What was the cross for you?

When I was a child, I liked to use it as an accessory. But one day I found another description:

The cross, a punishment for humiliating the insurgents under the Roman colonial rule;

The cross, a means for terrorising rebels by showing in public the corpses of political prisoners;

Lord Christ, had I made a mistake? Or did you get it wrong? You have become the insurgent, the defiant, the troublemaker and the perpetrator in the eyes of the world! You told the righteous to follow your example!

Lord Jesus, did you really like to cause trouble?! Why did you not keep the Sabbath law and brought yourself to the scourge of death? Even the homophobes knew to ask others how to comply with the Church rules. Why could you not follow the rules obediently?

Lord Christ, my heart was really broken. Why were you doing this?

---

[3] Remarks: a Chinese hymn sung almost in every parish when the faithful lined up for the veneration of the Cross.

Lord Jesus, you healed and cast out demons everywhere you went so that people were no longer controlled by the diseases and the colonial claws and could regain their own life and trust in God without colluding with the unrighteous totalitarian power. Even in the face of the intimidation of the cross, they still held on to your teachings to trust God and care for the weak. Powerless people united with and helped each other to resist colonial tyranny, rather than dragging out an ignoble existence for private interests. Lord, the oppressed sexual minority must be the object you wanted to unite, and the people you wanted to encourage! I could bear to deal with the hypocrites. I need your pardon and forgiveness!

Lord Christ, I still could not accept it. Why did you come to uphold God's righteousness, but meet such an ending? Was this your plan? You were so frightened you sweated beads of blood in the face of the threat of death of the powerful authorities! Why did you not call your supporters to a violent uprising? Where did your leadership and your power go?

Lord Jesus, knowing clearly that the Way of the Cross was an uprising that had to go through countless failures, you still told us to carry our cross. Did you not know how painful it could be for us? Did you not cherish your disciples and followers? Did you want to see us suffer?

Lord Christ, did you truly love your disciples? Didn't you wash your disciples' feet and find genuine love in adversity? Before your death, did you not pray to your Father that He would keep your beloved disciples?! Please bless your disciples, your followers, all righteous people, the poor, the weak, the meek, and the homosexuals!

Lord Jesus, why did you not resist or call on your followers to help you?! Did you really not want a more violent rebellion? Did you not really want the righteous people to shed blood for you? How were you able to carry on?

Lord Christ, who could want such a humiliating appearance? Who could have wanted the fate of losing power? Who could have chosen loneliness, helplessness, powerlessness, defencelessness and such a miserable and painful end?

I don't, no. No one could follow a Christ who is like this!

I don't, I don't, I don't...

I don't want to break my heart. I don't want to feel sad, no, no, no…

I don't, no. This way I would only get the ridicule and contempt of hypocrites! This Church that breaks my heart tears it open with pain, just like the Eucharist being sacrificed.

Through tearful eyes, I felt that I was seeing the countless faces of those abused, despised and oppressed in the world; and Christ the Lord with all the saints in heaven, who cared for my woe and weal and came to accompany me, led me to join in their procession and participate in their feast in heaven.

They wiped away my tears, healed my wounds, and let me rest quietly on my Lord's knee, upheld by their compassion.

This wandering and wounded soul was willing to share the cup of suffering of all people in the world in order to enjoy true peace and serenity.

> Blessed are those who mourn: they shall be comforted.
> Blessed are you when people abuse you and persecute you and speak all kinds of calumny against you falsely on my account.
> Rejoice and be glad, for your reward will be great in heaven; this is how they persecuted the prophets before you. (Matthew 5: 5, 11, 12)

Lord Jesus, with all the saints, prophets and sages, I thank you for your selfless offering, revealing the light in the gloom of bitterness and desperation to guide me. Lord, you affected and inspired all people, or everyone with love; and You resisted oppression in another way, never giving up even when you were threatened by death. You were my role model; you are my God!

Lord Christ, thank you for letting me see that there have always been people who resisted colonial domination and authoritarian power with love. They were treated brutally by the powerful, arrested although they had committed no crime, harassed and assaulted sexually. Some of them had few social resources and no good grasp of the future but just fought with sincere hearts, just like you. However, what they received in return were criminals' identities and criminal records. Many adults with abundant knowledge, high status, good economic conditions and strong social networks might have been able to bear these consequences. But those others had nothing, they didn't even belong to any support groups

and received no support and understanding from their families. Lord, I really worried about them. Please keep them in your mind!

Lord Jesus, those who were like you, extraordinary in their walking the path of the cross, worried about their future but never gave up their struggle. It was said that they should attend to their own interests, that it was foolish for them not to think of their own future. But were it not for their selfless devotion and sacrifice, we could never see the dawn of a just society! Lord, please let the light they share illuminate more people and inspire more selfless devotion.

Lord Christ, please also be proud of gay people. After those gay artists ventured out of the closet, they strongly supported gay equality and even stood on the frontline demanding social reform. There is even an artist who, loyal to her position, declared she would be an independent singer in order to continue to pursue truth and sincerity. Although it meant her income would be greatly reduced, she had no fear in her heart and saw infinite possibilities ahead instead. Lord, will you make the gays fearless, even if they needed to bear the agony of the cross and being crucified?

My Lord, my Lord, do you want me to live in love without fear? Even if my cross is very heavy, my heart in pain, crying and bleeding? I was with you as you cared for those who mourned and were persecuted, bearing their cross together. So often, ignorant human beings sinned for not understanding love. Many times I too have not known how to love or forgive.

"My people, what have I done to you? How have I offended you? Answer me!"

Easter Vigil

Holy Saturday celebrates Jesus' resurrection victory over death. I am afraid of being crucified; afraid of the slander and condemnation of the hypocrites; afraid of loneliness and abandonment in the search for love; but can I believe that the Cross is not my end?

Lord Christ, your death seemed to be a defeat but your battle of love through the power of God to resurrect you brought us, the homosexuals who defied and disobeyed the rules, new hope. Love is no longer the

manifestation of failure, but a way to triumph over fear and death. The ending of Your love has led to the beginning of our love. It is like an endless path, a path that allowed love to bring us to victory over the fight against death. Lord, please let us love non-stop to the end!

The paschal candle ignited my fervour, a fire of the heart committed me to follow the Lord Jesus Christ without turning back. This was similar to the touching moment when I was baptised, a moment that made me desire to live and die with the Lord. The unconditional love and sacrifice had not diminished even a tiny bit due to my inadequacy; instead, it made me experience even more the grace that I had freely received!

Lord Jesus chose me, it is not I who have chosen him. Please let me continue willingly to love more and more deeply even in the face of setbacks and failure. I don't want to be trapped by power and swallowed by disappointment.

I dedicated the song *An Unreserved Love* to my Lord Christ as my response.

> I've always been told love won't endure. Nowhere can one find love long and true.
> Love of the secular world cares only about possessing. It comes and goes.
> But I still believe love can last long. Your unfailing love has made me strong.
> You are the one I can depend upon. Come what may, you'll love me all along!
> Who died on the cross and took away my curse? Great is your love seen from your pierced hands.
> Look! The flowing blood proved your love unreserved. The ceaseless love never stops!
> Giving everything to you is all I pray. Use my life to serve you truly every day.
> I've no other demand but hope for your praise!

This song was originally written to commemorate Joanna Tse Yuen-Man, who died in the course of performing her duty in a hospital during the SARS epidemic in 2003, but it made me realise human love grows stronger and flourishes if it grows in the soil of offering. May the revolutionary love of homosexuals also be like this.

Resurrection

The world-renowned novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*, was based on the French Revolution. The great love shown by the male protagonist was a selfless dedication of his life in exchange for his rival's life in order to fulfil the love between the woman he loved and her lover. It might be such an era that creates such love, or that such love can also create such an era!

In times of trouble, we overcome the fear of coming out of the closet and gain the power of support. In the rainstorm, we experience the touching moment when people offer to hold open an umbrella without fear of standing out. "The revolution has not yet been achieved, *tongzhi* still have to work hard!" Open up our future of autonomy, hand in hand without fear! Hong Kong people have created this generation and lots of love stories as well! Let go of stability, love bravely, create history and love well!

I hope to create such an era by myself and hope this era creates me as well! Taking up the cross without fear of other people's accusations, I no longer have to rely on or beg for the Church's acceptance to live, but rely instead on God the Holy Spirit. I no longer have to struggle to live in the whirlpool of shame, but with the other *tongzhi* actively end the humiliation of LGBTQI+ members. Let us be ourselves peacefully and happily. Continue to take the risk of loving more, and loving endlessly!

Easter 2015

A Heavenly Maiden Dispersing Flowers Makes Butterflies Busy

Si Mei-lik,[1] *Hong Kong*

I am a gay Christian, who grew up in a single-parent family. My parents divorced when I was a boy. And when I was 12 years old, my mother let me live with my father as she needed to go out to work as a domestic helper. My father only gave me 30 cents for living expenses and 30 cents for travel each day. To have two meals, I needed to wander between my father and my mother. Only having 30 cents for lunch, I could have a stir-fried noodle, a stir-fried rice noodle and a bowl of sweet-potato soup at a food stall to appease my hunger. For breakfast, I would go back to school and be an altar server so as to have a breakfast voucher to exchange for a bowl of oatmeal and a bun in the tuck shop. Sometimes, when other schoolmates got there before me, my breakfast would end up being nothing.

My mother heard that studying in a church-run school was a good idea as the students become simple and pure in character. Yes, I am simple, my only interest being my path to homosexuality. When my mother wanted me to get baptised, at the age of 12, I was still naïve and pure. When I was 16, I started to grow and my world was completely overturned. Why did I have a crush on the class teacher and on the class monitor? Soon, in order to save one penny of travel fare, I used to walk from dad's home to mom's home. On the way home one day, I lost my

[1] The name Si Mei-lik also works as a pun. Readers who are interested in the author's story can find more detailed account in *Qingchang tongzhi: Xianggang 12 wei 'nan' tongzhi koushulishi yanjiu jihua*（情長同志—香港12位「男」同志口述歷史研究計畫）and *Nan nan zheng zhuan: Xianggang nianzhang nan tongzhi koushu shi*（男男正傳：香港年長男同志口述史）.

virginity to a man when I was in a crowd of people watching martial arts in the street. He was a man I did not know, but he took me into the gay world.

I might want to reject them, but still welcome any novelty and stimulations. Same-sex friendship attracted me more than God's love since I lacked fatherly love and brotherhood since childhood. I often confessed to get forgiveness for my sin, but soon committed it again. The priest just told me to stay away from sin and rely on God. Another more positive priest told me to do more exercise to counteract my libido in a physically demanding way. Did it work? For decades I have remained what I used to be and this year is the Golden Jubilee year of my entering the gay circle. Looking back from now, what did I get?

At that time, there was no social worker in the school and no Comprehensive Social Security Assistance.[2] My father was a fop who did nothing but just idle around and eat, hoping that grandfather's store on the mainland would be relinquished so he could own it again. Unfortunately, on the day he died, his hope was still unanswered. When I did not understand how to do my homework and asked him, he would tell me to finish it by myself. I could not pay the school fee for more than half a year. As the principal was inspecting every classroom every day, my classmates would call my student number and say that the principal had come to call for the school fee again. In the end, my mother had to show up herself and plead with him. Finally, the half-year school fee I owed was reduced to three months. My mother was strange as well. If ever she disliked her boss, she would just walk out. I needed to go and fix up the mess she left, pack up her stuff to bring it home and apologise for her.

Under such circumstances, the psychological pressure on me grew greater and greater. Could the situation be changed just by relying on prayers to God? Having no money to pay school fees forced me to quit and go to work while studying at an evening school. Working as a trainee in a relative's company, I received no salary since they had paid for my

[2] A welfare programme in Hong Kong that provides subsidies to residents whose income is not sufficient to meet basic needs. Such income subsidy is coordinated by the Hong Kong Social Welfare Department.

mother's living expenses in advance and I had to repay her debt. In this situation, how could I study successfully? Furthermore, I began to make friends and became distracted and could not concentrate. My school results lagged behind. In less than two years, I completely dropped out. After that, I came out to work. I bought pictorials with my travel allowance. I made friends via newspaper ads. Most of my gay friends were met in that way. Our friendship has been kept so far and we travel together each year.

My parents have passed away now but their departure never made me shed a drop of tears. To my mother, I had already done my duty; to my father, I have no feelings, not to mention that he had several wives. I have decided that if my half-brothers and sisters still want to maintain some affection, I am willing to do so. If not, I would prefer to be out of touch like strangers till I die.

I am a Sunday Mass churchgoer. I honour the Lord in my heart and do not beg for any heavenly marriage. I just have a doubt in my heart: why did I have such fate? On the one hand, I continue to meet people and seek friendship; on the other hand, I never diminish my conscience to honour the Lord. The Bible says, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind; and you must love your neighbour as yourself." Love the Lord and your neighbour: I have done that and I also love many men.

It was not a smooth path, my road to love. I finally accepted my good friend as a lover, but in less than half a year, he went off to love someone else, explaining that he wanted to break away from his gay life. In the month of my birthday, he brought me to his girlfriend and told me not to make any mistake or misunderstanding and that anything I tried would be in vain.

Later, there was the emergence of gay social networks. Short messages were sent to me by friends as help to the people of the world. So I forwarded them to other netizens as a form of evangelisation, hoping to convert other gay friends around me. Father Thomas Kwan once said in a homily that there was a Gospel sentence saying, "Cast your net into the deep." I felt that strongly: on the high sea, cast out into the deep and absorbing all the trust and reliance on God like a sponge falling into the sea. Or like a ball in the hand of little Jesus: when he was

in favour of me, he naturally loved me and he could not let me go and enjoyed watching me frequently. However, when there were other toys that attracted him more, he would put me into a corner, leave me alone and let me fall into spiritual desolation. I had to wait until his heart changed, and he favoured me again.

Every morning when jogging, I used to recite the Rosary, when my brain was full of the intention of praying. Every time one decade was recited, I prayed to the Virgin Mary to bless this person, this place and this thing. Gradually, it developed as a habit and I could recite by heart without any Rosary beads. May the Virgin Mary bless every friend I know, including you who are reading my article.

My motto now is, "When it comes, let it come. Don't seek anything deliberately and be at ease with the current situation. Let destiny decide everything." If my parents are now in heaven, they certainly will bless me silently for taking care of all beings with all my efforts in my gay identity and living up to the Lord's expectations. "No sons or daughters beside your sickbed; no husband with you to the end." But everyone's fate is different. I do not blame God and condemn no one. I only hope to live happily every day and that would be enough!

Morning Dedication Prayer: "My Lord! For what I will experience today, please give me wisdom" (Remarks: lie flat on the bed for three minutes. Turn your mind to God. Remember what you are going to do today and ask for sanctification from God. Then get up so that your blood pressure is normal).

Bedtime Thanksgiving Prayer: "My Lord! For what has been experienced today, please give me gratitude" (Remarks: settle our thought for three minutes. Recall and reflect on the merits and demerits of today. Ask for the Lord's forgiveness. Recite the 'Act of Contrition' and 'My Guardian Angel',[3] bow toward the Lord's resting place, and then sleep with the Lord).

---

[3] In the Catholic faith it is thought that at the very beginning of our life, God sends us an angel to take care of us until our death. This angel is called a guardian angel. The guardian angel helps us to move forward to goodness, avoid evil, and helps us to pray. The Psalmist wrote: "He has given his angels orders about you to guard you wherever you go" (Psalms 91:11).

Daily prayers: "Almighty and eternal God, your generous love far exceeds our merits and expectations. Please give us mercy, forgive us our sins, overcome our uneasiness, and award the grace we dare not ask for. Amen."

Why Must We Divide Male and Female?

Yi On, Hong Kong

As a lesbian Catholic with a masculine outlook, the first pressure I need to face is not my sexual orientation but my appearance. Human beings can be so superficial. The thing they are most unwilling to let go of is the appearance of others' bodies.

At a time when society is still full of mainstream gender discourse, if you are not easily distinguished as a male or a female, you can cause public anxiety with your very existence, even without doing anything. Such a situation is even worse in the conservative Catholic community. All the gender stereotypes like 'women should wear skirts', 'shouldn't wear a crew cut like a man' and 'should be gentle like a woman' and so on. These stereotypes put me under a lot of pressure from an early age. Moreover, when you go to the toilet, trouble would come. For no matter which toilet you enter, it will attract strange stares and even insults. Since then, the decision to go to the toilet puts me under pressure, at least once a day.

My appeal is very simple, "I just want to pee…"

Well, time made more brothers and sisters recognise me as female instead of male. Then they started to automatically associate and ask, "Are you a lesbian? If not, why do you dress like a man? Girls can just be friends! God only blesses a marriage between man and woman… [*deleting the 10,000 words that follow*]." It seemed that as long as your appearance was feminine, you were not pretending to be masculine; if you were not pretending to be masculine, you were not marrying a woman; if you were not marrying a woman, you were not a lesbian; if you were not a lesbian, then you both were good friends. Thanks, God!

When a girl fell in love with me, I had to first face my inner struggle as to whether I would make God unhappy, and then the struggle whether we could trust each other. If she loved me because I was like a male, she might eventually choose to marry a physiological male who was recognised by the world; if she loved females, what if I was too masculine? Who could I talk to in face of this struggle? When I went to confess, those conservative priests did not forgive my sins; those tolerant priests who were not familiar with the subject were unable to provide guidance, and those enlightened priests gave me more psychological counselling than spiritual guidance.

I went to find help from laypeople. Those leftists just vent the pain of emotion, and those rightists… you know [*deleting the 10,000 words that follow*]. Those who dared to act were suffocated by the system. Maybe my middle-sex body directly reflected my status: sticking in-between. Gay Catholics thought I was conservative; middle-class Catholics thought me radical; grassroots Catholics did not understand what I was talking about. As a result, I was walking alone on my own path.

Years later, I still am living with my middle-sex body. There are more non-mainstream voices in society now. I become more comfortable going to the toilet. The body is always the first battlefield in any oppression. The female body is permanently sexualised. When you are full of feminine characteristics, you will be regarded as the source of temptation, seducing the heterosexual male to commit crimes. If you have no female characteristics, you will be regarded as beyond the ordinary and as not remaining in one's proper sphere. I thought to myself: Am I not a being? God loves me very much! When the Church says that we need to sanctify ourselves and sanctify others as well. Does it really think through if it wants to say 'holy' or 'sex'?[1]

How did I get over it? Apart from the grace of God, it is still the grace of God. Who taught me to trust the grace of God? Is it the Catholic Church? Yes, the Catholic Church is the key medium. Is the Catholic Church great? No way! It's just God who is great, not the medium that is great. As long as you read the Bible with more care, it is easy to find that

---

[1] In Cantonese, 'holy' and 'sex' are pronounced the same, *sing*.

God specially selected odd and strange people to be his disciples. The whole Church, especially all its leadership, is like that. But the grace of God is still transmitted through this group of creatures, so that we can be more certain that this is God's credit, not man's. Just as the bread, it does not do anything, but God made it to be His body but the bread still has to do a good job, at least not letting itself expire or grow mouldy! Although 'mouldy' Catholics are everywhere. The grace of God is enough for me!

Confession of Double-Identity: Christian and Gay

Giovanni Battista, Hong Kong

After being invited to write this article, I thought about it for a long time and didn't know how to write and share my own double identities (being Catholic and gay). Apart from not being good at writing, most importantly, I can't share my experience with you as an experienced person. The reason is that I, approaching 30 years old, still feel uneasy with my double identities from time to time, and it is still easy for me to have negative emotions. I want to give up one of my identities. I have even thought of committing suicide. The road is not easy to walk, and I am still walking cautiously. Fortunately, I can overcome all the difficulties one by one with my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the tabernacle and the Blessed Heavenly Mother by my side.

Most of the time, I am in a mental state of being 'incapable of reading my mind'. On the one hand, it is based on 'the honesty of my body' so that I am very clear, without doubt, that I like people of the same gender as myself. On the other hand, as I have been growing up in a Catholic family, studying in a Catholic school and accepting Catholic education, I have been instilled, more or less, with the concept that homosexuality or homosexual acts are a sin and are what God dislikes. I sometimes really hate myself and even spread my hatred to my parents and the Lord, asking why they have made me like that. Such a sexual orientation gives me pain.

I was a good boy in front of other people, especially the brothers and sisters in the Church. I had to use all kinds of excuses to conceal my sexual orientation. Why does God give me such an orientation which the world does not tolerate? As it is totally different to the comparison

such as drug addictions and theft commonly quoted by the pastors (such as the remark of then Auxiliary Bishop Michael Yeung Ming-cheung in 2015 that "homosexuality is like drug addiction"), I have no choice! If that kind of orientation is not in accordance with God's will, why did God create me and so many homosexuals? If homosexuals are sinners, it is no different to regard the sick person, people with leprosy and the handicapped born with disabilities as sinners to be punished and cursed by God, as in the Middle Ages. I want to ask the pastors of today, be they Catholic or Protestant, if you would think and preach that the disabled are cursed by God? Will you say that the people with leprosy are God's punishment? If not, why do they spare no effort to preach that homosexuals could not go to heaven and that homosexuals are disliked by God? Have you ever thought about the feelings of gays, especially gay Christians? Have you ever figured out ways to understand our feelings and thoughts? Have you ever tried to love us? Why do you attack us like severe floods and fierce beasts? We are also the flock of the Lord!

I still remember that when I was in junior high school, I once went to a Catholic hospital for an operation. During the whole week, I was so bored that I went to the hospital chapel every morning at 6 am to attend the daily Mass. One day after the mass, when I saw a priest on duty in a confession booth at the rear of the chapel, on a whim I went forward to confess. In the confession, I told the priest as usual that I have a homosexual orientation and didn't know what to do. The priest gave me a very unusual reaction, asking me to come out of the confession booth to let him see who I was exactly. I was only 14 or 15 years old at that time and certainly did whatever I was told. I came out of the booth at his request and sat in the last row of the benches. He sized me up and asked, "What is your name? What is your phone number? It is pity that I am rushing to preside over a Mass elsewhere and cannot go into details with you. But I must introduce you to an institution. Though it is not a Catholic institution, we have cooperated with it before. It can help you." While he was speaking, he found a small note from his pocket and slowly wrote down the name 'New Creation Hong Kong' and its phone number. I was timid at that time and finally only told the priest my baptismal name. He put down the note and then left. I was a little bit startled by the priest's unusual reaction. So after he hurried away, I went back to the

booth to see the name tag in front of the door, written 'Father Kuo XX'.

After staying in the hospital for a few more days, I was discharged. When I got home, I immediately checked what the 'New Creation Hong Kong' was on the internet. Thank God! Except reading how the association's official website boasted that it had succeeded in helping many homosexuals "convert to become straight," I also read a lot of negative comments about this kind of conversion association; for example, in foreign countries, how they would 'exorcise' you; use electric shock 'therapy' to convert you, and even pushed some help-seekers so much that they developed depression and killed themselves. After reading these online reviews, I was horrified and ended up not trying to contact the Association.

Last year, after more than a decade, I unexpectedly met this Father Kuo XX again. He turned out to be the spiritual director of the Diocesan Committee for the Pastoral Care of Persons with Same-sex Attraction (which was dissolved in 2015) and gave a talk to a three-day overnight youth pilgrimage summer camp that I also participated in. The theme of the talk was the 'Truth of Same-sex Marriage'.

He did not explain much why the Church disagreed with same-sex marriage. Instead, he used a very despicable way to discredit homosexuals. He kept playing footage of Taiwanese homosexual parades and deliberately magnified some of the videos and images of the gays wearing sexy or SM suits in the parades. He also told us that these groups were previously named LG (an abbreviation for lesbians and gays) but were later renamed LGBT (BT standing for bisexuals and transgenders). Recently, they were renamed LGBTQI+ (QI standing for queer and intersex) in order to absorb people of other sexual habits and so on. He kept creating stereotypes about gays and described them as having a special sexual preference, dressing revealingly and promiscuously. In that one-hour lecture, being a gay Christian, I was in agony. At the end, he also showed a YouTube video of Xiao Cho (Joseph Cho Man-kit), a famous homosexual in Hong Kong, in which he dressed as the 'Holy Mother with big breast' and he influenced the Catholic youth who were present saying, "See, the homosexuals are all anti-Christ. They are also disrespectful to Holy Mary." The atmosphere in the room immediately became feverish, and the young people kept cursing the gays for their disrespect.

As a young gay Catholic who was a fervent devotee to the Blessed Mother, I really could not stand it anymore. How aggrieved my heart was. I could only run to the washroom and cry. Why did the Church and the clerics always speak out discriminatively about everyone and describe them and the homosexuals as enemies? In order to achieve their purposes, they used every means to discredit the homosexuals. Did they know that there is also a significant population of gay Catholics in the Church? When you take a step back to say that homosexuality was a crime, did Jesus not always teach us to love the sinners? Didn't just see the thorn in your brother's eyes? But their smearing would only force more homosexuals to leave the Church one by one.

Thank God I joined the Compassion-HK LGBTQ Catholics Union recently. In the group, I met many faithful gays who have had similar experiences and struggles. We support each other and affirm our identities as both gays and faithful Christians. These two identities are not mutually exclusive and could coexist with pride and veneration. If I did not encounter this loving organisation, I believed that I would still live under the shadow of being rejected and unaccepted. Or maybe I would have already ended my own life.

God loves all people; God loves the gays. May the Holy Spirit continue to bless and preserve different gay Christian groups, in particular, the Compassion-HK LGBTQ Catholics Union. May these organisations continue to serve and witness God's love as the salt of the earth and the light of the world and become the tool of God's love and peace.

Our Lady of Sorrows, pray for me!

St Francis of Assisi, pray for me!

Taiwan

The Seed That Fell Among the Thorns

Oprah, Taiwan

If not for…

I am Oprah, currently in my 40s. If not for being bisexual, if not for experiencing a long and agonising process of self-recognition and acceptance, as well as working in a church for some time which led to a novel reflection on faith, if not for working up the courage to face the reality, if not for getting to know more people in the same situation, if not for these experiences, I think I would have been like many other Catholics in Taiwan, signing petitions or even protesting against same-sex marriages. It could have been so easy.

My parents were very affectionate towards each other. Many relatives and friends were quite envious of them. When I was young, I thought I would have been the same when I grew up—owning a home, raising children with a husband and forming a joyful family. These were all childhood imaginations about the future. Over time, I grew to learn that I was not only interested in males, but I was easily attracted to beautiful and gracious women and I even developed strong desires for them. This different sexual orientation frightened me more and more, especially with the fact that I was a faithful Catholic who has been going to Masses with her mother since young and was baptised in high school. I knew the Church taught us that being attracted to the same-sex was abnormal and sinful, and the Lord loathed the act of homosexuality. Women should love men. Eve should be cleaved unto Adam, giving birth to many offspring and letting them spread around the world, forming a blessed family that pleases the Lord. It was not a marriage between Eve and Eve. If it were, it would have displeased the Lord and be cursed.

The end of humanity, the beginning of God

My sexual orientation has brought me much loneliness and hopelessness. The Church's stance and teaching on this matter also caused me to fall into a darker abyss. The teaching shackled me like the curse on the Monkey King Sun Wukong. I was afraid of my own self, becoming extremely homophobic and emotionally repressed. Until I turned 20, I met a Catholic woman who I fell in love with. I could not extricate myself from my obsession over her. The irrepressible love created so much agony and struggle in my heart, and the pain only grew stronger along with my love for her. There was one time, we scheduled to go on a pilgrimage to the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Wu Fong Ci in Jiaoxi township, Yilan county. When she called me on the phone, telling me something came up and she had to cancel the trip, my loss and pain reached their peak. After hanging up, I decided to go on this pilgrimage on my own, seeking God's salvation and grace.

I have been to the Marian shrine once or twice with my mother and other fellow Catholics. It takes four to five hours to get to the shrine on the peak from the walkways at the foot of the mountain. From what I remembered, there was a section that was very narrow and dangerous. I went to the station to get the earliest train I could get and took a two-hour trip from Taipei then switched to a taxi to reach the foot of the mountain.

It was so quiet in the mountain. I walked alone and wept. I did not understand why I was so different from the others—attracted to the same-sex, even falling in love with a woman. I did not know why I loved this woman so deeply. The loneliness and pain were killing me, but to whom I could turn? To whom I could talk? The Church, counsellors and many others would never understand these feelings. I felt like only I was so different that I was like a monster. The desperation—loneliness, internal conflicts and agony—made me want to take my own life. I wanted to just jump from the mountain, ending my life and the immense pain. But when I looked down from the peak, there were houses densely packed together with lights lit brightly. I thought of my dear family, especially my mother and younger sister. I could picture the scenarios of my funeral, and how much pain my family would have to bear. My

love for my family pulled me back from the edge like an invisible thread, preventing me from making a mistake. I gave up the suicidal thought, turned around, and continued my path of seeking God's mighty mercy and redemption, to rescue me from the abyss of agony.

I walked for more than an hour. It was close to the evening when I reached the Tung Tian Footbridge. The skyline was dimming. I estimated it would take me another two or three hours to reach my destination. "What if it gets dark halfway through my journey?" I thought to myself, "Well, I don't want to turn back. Since I'm here now, I might as well continue going up. If it really does get dark halfway through, then I will just sit down on the roadside and wait until dawn. Dawn in the mountain came at around 5 or 6 am anyway."

The lead of grace

Having yet to reach the villa, the sky had already darkened. I forgot that it also got dark a lot earlier on the mountain. Those lost hikers in the past have seen the apparition of the Blessed Mother leading them to safety. Did I also want to let the Blessed Mother shine light on the path ahead of me? It would be frightening if one sees some strange light shining through the darkness out of the blue. God understands everyone, and he led me in a different way.

When the darkness embraced me, my heart remained calm and peaceful. I could walk in the dark without fear, and there seemed to be a map in my brain, pointing out the path I should take. Even though I could not see with my eyes, I knew where I was. I could make the right decision when I stood before a split road. It was miraculous. Walking in the dark, time seemed to pass much slower. Not knowing how long I had been walking, I started to panic, suspecting I had gone to another mountain. I continued my journey in anxiety. When I finally stepped on the stairs leading to the Sanctuary, the excitement in my heart was indescribable. God's grace and companionship had always been guarding me in the dark night. The next day, I walked the Way of the Cross along with fellow Catholic pilgrims and left the shrine after praying to the Blessed Mother. What accompanied me on my way home was a peaceful mind, and my love and appreciation for God's care for me.

Spiritual healing

Leaving the mountain, my problems and pain still existed. God did not take them away or change the situation miraculously. But not long after, in a prayer meeting, I met Fr Richard Wang, who was well-known for his experience and reputation in spiritual healing and charismatic works. After the meeting, I walked up with courage to ask if Fr Wang would have time to perform spiritual healing on me. I never expected the healing and companionship lasted for six to seven years until Fr Wang passed away in 1999. God's grace is beyond imagination. Through Fr Wang's prayers, God gave me so much love that He healed the wounds on my soul, which have been accumulated in the past of my life, especially the one about the relationship between my grandmother and me. I experienced love in the companionship of Fr Wang, other nuns and mothers. I opened up my heart, no longer acting so cynical. I have become a gentler person, having a deeper understanding of humanity.

Interreligious dialogue and cooperation

Later on, I coincidentally made contact with the Church's work on 'interreligious dialogue cooperation', which had many contacts with other religions such as Buddhism, Islam and Yiguandao, etc., and their followers. It expanded my originally narrowed vision about Christianity, allowing me to experience a much wider and richer world of religions. I saw the many faces of God. I saw the pursuit of the ultimate reality, the truth, the goodness and the holiness. There are, of course, differences in the teachings of different religions, but they somehow resemble each other in a certain way. I also saw the egocentrism and obstinacy hidden in religions. It is not easy to make peace between religions, showing mutual respect and modesty. In this tour of religions, I realised the development of each religion was heavily influenced by the contemporary culture, by their own traditions and history, and the significant figures in the said religion. God did not only show his saving grace within the Church, but also outside the Church. The teachings of the Church also have their cultural limitations. Every religion has its own shortcomings that can be purified and growth. Religions can never shake off the influence of humanity. It was humans who wrote those sacred

texts and scriptures. It was also humans who interpreted them. No man is complete, and there are limitations in our cognition. I began to be able to notice and distinguish which parts of a religion are the work of humans and which are the work of God.

Changes and growth in life

While I was going through the rich experience of faith, I was relieved from the curse of my life—the guilt and fear arising from my different sexual orientation. I realised the importance of self-reflection in one's spiritual life.

My unique sexual orientation has allowed me to grow up. Originally, I was easily influenced by others, unassertive, overly rigid, inflexible and I often blindly believed in the authority. But after all these experiences, I started to have my own thoughts. I began to know who I am and believe in myself instead of the authority. I can now bravely pursue the life and happiness I long for. I can finally be myself and walk my own path. It is not easy, but one must be true to oneself and to one's feelings, be responsible for one's own life, and be courageous. We will eventually be able to cross the darkness and storms.

The Grace of God

Now I live with my partner, her younger sister and mother, as well as a stray dog adopted by my partner. My partner and I often read the Bible together before going to sleep, sharing God's words and praying together. Whenever we visit Zhubei, we attend the Masses there. We also take part in the fellowship group in Tong-Kwang Light House Presbyterian Church whenever we go to Taipei. We also have some friends in the circle who care about and pray for each other.

God's love is always with us

Life may not be easy. The path we take may be lonely and difficult, and we often have to suffer from others' ignorance, exclusion, prejudice and discrimination. But remember, Jesus himself has walked through a similar path, setting an example for us to look up to. Thank God for his love and grace. Let everything turn into praises to our Lord.

You are My Father, and I Am Your Beloved Son

Anthony Cheng, Taiwan

"Chastity is not a virtue that is fulfilled at the moment of vow-taking. It is one's lifelong struggle to obtain freedom from different kinds of temptations."

Growth

You created my inmost being; knit me together in my mother's womb. For so many marvels I thank you; a wonder am I, and all your works are wonders. You know me through and through. (Job 139:13-14)

Looking back at my growth, I can feel and understand why David wrote his wholehearted praise to Yahweh in Psalm 139.

I was raised in a middle-class family. My parents did not receive much higher education, but their cultivation of faith and school education went hand in hand. As a result, I was raised with an intimate relationship with God through prayer. Despite having occasional spiritual desolations, over time I can see that God has a special plan for me in life. I accept what he has given me—my weaknesses, difficulties and challenges as well as my sexual orientation.

I was a typical Taiwanese Catholic, born in the 1970s and was baptised soon after birth. I received my First Communion and learned how to serve as an altar server in my junior years of elementary school, and then received my Confirmation in senior years of elementary school. In junior high, I started to attend summer camps. This was the stage when many other Taiwanese Catholics dropped out of their faith due to academic stress, but I still maintained my passion in faith and

took part in many church activities. In the process, I gained a deeper understanding of faith.

My life did not always go smoothly since youth. I did not quite fit with my parents' expectations—I did not act like other average boys who normally played around in the field after school. I did not like sports which were naturally boys' favourites. On the contrary, I enjoyed chatting with girls, and was deemed as too talkative. I was bad at sports, scared of tripping over and bleeding. I was not a courageous and masculine boy.

I cared about my male friends. Usually, I became very close to those boys with bookish charm. We would go to the river and take a stroll, sometimes catch some fish, sometimes take a swim. When swimming, I often looked at other sexually mature guys in the senior forms or in junior high. I felt a strong urge to take a peek at their underwear, especially after being soaked in water. At the same time, I was so ashamed of these thoughts. I was torn in this dilemma.

In this stage, the religious education and liturgical classes I received at Church, as well as the requirement for confessions, on the one hand, shaped my behaviours and moral values, and on the other hand, gave me a feeling of immense guilt. I even prayed to God, saying that I would resist seeking pleasure from my body. I would never sin against myself again.

My spiritual life and physiological desires were two extremes in my life. Reaching senior high, my emotional and physiological desires grew even stronger, and I realised I had fallen in love with a classmate. It was torture, but I would force myself to believe that it was just me being immature and dependent on a friend.

In my family, both my cousin and I were expected to become priests in the future. As a result, we were often invited to visits various religious congregations. We also had close contacts with major seminarians of the diocese and priests who are responsible for vocations. We were frequently invited to join vocation camps and summer camps of the Eucharist society. Of course, I dared not to share my problems regarding my sexuality with my cousin. He, being self-disciplined, did not seem to be bothered by sexuality at all, and he always had an excellent academic performance. He successfully embarked on his priesthood, becoming the honour of the family. While I chose to stay low, fading out of the

discussion on the priesthood.

I tried to date some girls during my university years, exploring the possibilities to fall in love with the opposite sex. I have both pursued and been pursued in the meantime. My body and mind continued to struggle against each other. I have thought that joining a monastery might be a relief—I would no longer need to be bothered by my sexual orientation. But after a brief experience in a monastery, even though the life of daily prayers and Masses was appealing to me, I realised it was in fact an environment with even greater temptation.

It was when I was in university, I started to receive spiritual counselling from a priest of the Society of Jesus. It allowed me on one hand to experience prayers in-depth, and on the other hand, the priest also taught me how to handle natural desires and emotions. He wanted me to first of all thank God for blessing me with a healthy body and a healthy mind. If not for it, I would not have experienced these normal reactions and feelings healthy people would have. After that, he taught me how not to let these affect my decisions.

Since I was young, sex has been a shameful matter. I have been casting about trying to search for an understanding of it, as well as struggling to fight it. When I was praying, I have been asking God "why am I so dependent on friends? Why do I care so much about some classmates?" Not until I read the stories written by Pai Hsien-yung did I realise what was going on. Reading the description of those fair-skinned young men, I felt like my desires had finally been acknowledged.

Relationship with God

Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me. (Luke 22:42)

Since finally understanding the meaning of the atmosphere of liturgical prayers, every year when it comes to Lent, or whenever I read about the Passion of Christ, this passage of Jesus's prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane is particularly touching. "Father, if you are willing, take this cup away from me." I am so different from the others. I am so lonely.

I got to know a lot of priests and nuns in church activities, and they have given me various images of God. Some priests introduced me to the righteous God. Therefore, we should frequently confess our wrongdoings.

Otherwise, God will judge us, and we would never be able to walk out of our sins. Some others introduced me to the loving God, who is patient and merciful.

In university, a priest gave me a card illustrating Jesus praying in the Garden of Gethsemane. Instead of a sorrowful image of him in the night before the trial, sweating as if he was bleeding, kneeling on the floor glaring into the dark sky, in the illustration, he was sitting on a stone, with moonlight reflecting on his face. It was a calm atmosphere that made for a long conversation. The priest then told me, this should be our relationship with the Lord. Eventually, I grew to like sitting in the church in front of the Eucharist and talking to God the Father and Jesus Christ.

Maybe there were too many conflicts, and I eventually decided to surrender to my desires. At the same time, a life that was more down-to-earth seemed a lot more colourful to me than a life devoted to the priesthood. That was why I did not become a priest, at least I made the decision at that time. It made me the person I am today: keeping a safe distance from the church but maintaining the passion for my belief. I stay away from the huge net of interpersonal relationships and peer pressure so that my personal life will not get involved. I do not need to participate in family prayers in the parish or be introduced to dates, etc. They would only embarrass both me and the other people involved.

Group retreat is my way of maintaining a close relationship with God. It was also in the midst of a retreat that I first admitted my homosexuality to a priest, acknowledging my lifelong struggle with my sexuality.

Into the deep

Pope Francis gave the following words, "If a person is gay and seeks God and has goodwill, who am I to judge?" It gave me great consolation. Was he not talking about me? That is why I treat other minorities with the same mindset. Because of my trusting relationship with the Lord, the stance of the Church does not affect my faith too much. The Church is no longer the main circle of my life, or at least, I choose to leave a safe distance between me and fellow Catholics who focus on "normal family life as the mainstay."

Battle between my gay identity and recognition from the Church

It is a struggle to both love the Church I belong to and to recognise my homosexual identity. I love my Church deeply, as it is the home of my soul. I care about it as much as I love my country. As a result, when someone criticises my Church, I will immediately stand up and defend it. However, I cannot deny that the Church is formed by humans and it has its weaknesses and sometimes makes mistakes. There are institutional problems, as well as qualitative problems caused by individuals.

> Foxes have holes and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head. (Luke 9:58)

This secret that I had been keeping throughout my teenage years shaped me into a lonely person. I always choose to be occupied and it has become my work style. Most of the time I work alone, but it also allows me to understand the agony of Jesus in Garden of Gethsemane, how he relied on talking to God the Father, constantly refining his motivation and faith in being the Son of God to sacrifice for our sins. I repeatedly look back at every priest and nun who has provided guidance in my spiritual life, and I always get comforted in prayers.

However, as I grew older, I was also hoping to know more people who shared the same faith and experience. I wanted us to support and accompany each other, going through the process hand-in-hand. I also hope that I could share my experience with them when they were struggling, letting them know that God would never abandon them. I am glad that with the social changes in recent years, there have been some fellow Catholics who were brave enough to come out of the closet. I felt like we have been accepted and are free to share our secret identities as brothers and sisters in God.

> Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her. (John 8:7)

It was the most difficult to amend my relationship with God while coexisting with my desires and emotions, as well as to obtain freedom of the soul. Maybe growing up with a sensitive mind, I pay a lot more attention to the incidents in the Church when some made mistakes

due to lust. It is not because I want to gossip, rather I am trying to understand the truth: Chastity is not completed at the moment of vow-taking. It is one's lifelong struggle against various desires.

The culture of the LGBTQI+ circle can lead people to become wilful, wanting to get the most enjoyment out of their life, but in return they lose the most freedom. However, only people who surpass superficial desires can gain the freedom they long for. But this is a challenge for everyone. I do not understand why only the LGBTQI+ community has to suffer from the censure from the expectation of chastity.

The church stigmatised the LGBTQI+ community and their social movements for fear of "immoral values tainting the society." But it was counterproductive. If we follow what Jesus said to the woman taken in adultery, "Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her." Treating others in an inclusive and inviting manner, wouldn't that be better at conveying the spirit of the gospel?

"Yahweh gave, Yahweh has taken back. Blessed be the name of Yahweh!"

In the Old Testament, many prophets and parables expressed their faith in God. In my experience, I have witnessed many older generations spending their entire life being faithful and loyal to God. Many well-respected bishops, priests and nuns have become models of faith. Their lifelong efforts purified their weaknesses through obedience, chastity and the guidance of God. It made me realise that, sexual orientation is merely a part of people's lives. We (the LGBTQI+ community) are like everyone else. There is no difference in the eyes of God.

God loves me in a unique way. I can sense in my prayers that he does not need me to be his tool of peace because of who I am. That is enough.

A Lone Pilgrimage

André, Taiwan

"The reason why they were created must not consist only in overcoming their unique desires: God does not create people just so they can be tortured. The more appropriate thing to do is to integrate this unique trait into the person's life, so they can discover the meaning of God's plan."

One

I never thought I would become a Christian. From my youth, I realised that, unlike other girls, my attraction was not for boys. But compared to other weird things about me, 'liking girls' was insignificant, especially when I could easily hide it deep in my heart.

I never thought I would become a Christian, because from an early age, I knew 'Christians' were just a group of 'righteous' people who used the excuse of 'love' to hurt others without feeling remorse. Those they really wanted to hurt were people like me—those who are attracted to the same sex. I could not understand. I never got to choose what kind of person I am attracted to, and I have never hurt anyone. I never made any Christian friends. Why would those distant people be so enthusiastic about hurting me and claiming that I was evil?

The first Christian I knew was in high school. She was a very kind girl. She spoke softly and slowly, and she treated everyone in a gentle manner. I never felt discriminated against or excluded by her. That was the first time I got to speak to a Christian properly. We sat next to the lotus pond in school, chatting at ease. We talked about her religion. She told me you could only be saved if you were baptised. I was puzzled, "My grandparents and parents are not Christians, but they are good people.

Can't they go to heaven?" She answered me as if it was normal for her to come across this problem, "No, because they are not baptised." The pictures of hell I had seen on the pillars and walls of a temple when I was young crossed my mind. I was very confused and asked again, "But wouldn't it be so pitiful for them?" I also thought of Africa, where tribes had no contact with the outside world and those remote areas in China. She again answered me with a merciful look on her face, "It is we who are truly pitiful! Our brothers and sisters are in hell."

Some staggered rows of palm trees and banyan trees were growing alongside the lotus pond, a small body of water surrounded by rocks. Some fallen leaves and water plants were floating on the water's surface. Under the water, there were the red silhouettes of the carps. The silhouettes broke and re-formed with every stone I threw in the pond. The wind was still blowing. My world was rocked by her words. That was a completely alien worldview with such narcissism and indifference towards other souls. That became my final conclusion about Christians. My shock did not show. The days went by, and I lost interest in Christianity for a very long time.

Two

The earliest moment when I had any idea of 'sex' was in kindergarten. I was being taken care of by an aunt. She was very well-off, but had only three sons. That was why she projected onto me her expectations about having a daughter. I was raised like a princess. Wearing a red dress with black lace, ballet flats made with white, shiny leather, learning how to use hairpins on my long hair, how to match the tops with the bottoms, how to match the colours of eye shadow and nail polish, etc. When perms first became popular, I was taken to a salon, where I wore a strange hat and was 'baked' for a few hours. Now, even if the quality of the photos from that period is bad, it is still easy to pick me out because of my big, curly hairstyle.

My mother came from a big family. They all had close relationships with each other. I was the first kid born after a long break without births in the family, and I grew up with lots of care from a group of pretty aunts and handsome male cousins. After my birth, a few other girls were born as well. My family life meant being involved in this huge family, as if I

had several mothers, many elder brothers with an age gap of more than 10 years, as well as a few girl playmates. At that time, I did not know much about gender. In that kind of environment, gender differences were not obvious. Parents,[1] playmates who were either older than me or at a similar age—they all equally supported my family life. Gender was not a concept of differentiation, but rather a concept of roles.

Life as a girl in primary school was not strange to me. There were not a lot of conflicts or difficulties. I was not an active child, rather bad at sports but I loved reading. I was not good at socialising with others, and that was why when everyone was forming groups, most of the time I would only be minding my own business quietly on my own. I always thought I had an unsociable personality, not able to understand the sense of community. I grew up without a place to settle. Many years after, when I had finally come to terms with my sexuality, I realised that self-identification not only helps the outside world to label oneself, but also helps the individual to define oneself. Some people hate labelling, but on the contrary, I felt incomplete because I could never find the category I belonged to. It lasted until the fifth or sixth grade in primary school. My realisation of 'liking someone' came late. When other girls started to gossip about their crushes, I realised I was drawing a blank. Later on, I chose a guy in the same class as a cover—he was popular, being many girls' crush—to hide my ignorance about love... until I began to grow feelings for someone. Then it was unfortunately a girl who 'shared the same crush' as me.

In fact, falling in love with the same sex did not cause me too much internal conflict. Loving someone was so instinctive and pure, without any ulterior motives and above the external social rules. My inner self was also unanimous that I could not blame myself. But I knew it was abnormal. That was why I hid it well, bringing this secret and confusion to junior high.

Both junior high and senior high were not easy for me. I found the

[1] Caretakers responsible for taking care of children. Other than parents, they can also be grandparents or elder relatives, or even siblings at a similar age. In modern families, there may be many people sharing the responsibilities of taking care of the younger ones.

classes tailored for university entrance and the 'study-first' atmosphere very repressing. Other than that, the all-female environment also made me feel out of place, and unfriendly exclusion began to appear. Personal items were damaged, malicious notes were sent by anonymous persons... Although I did not feel my safety was threatened, I could sense alienation and loneliness. My body was like a shell, and my real self was hiding inside it. Some parts were closer to the shell while others were further away. But in any case, this shell was not the real me. In senior high, I was not motivated by studying, and so often missed the school bus at 6.30 am. As a result, I resorted to taking city buses. On my bus trips, I got to know the side of Taipei that was unfamiliar to me. I discovered Xinsheng South Road, which was also known as 'Heaven Road'. Since senior high, I started to develop an interest in religions, anthropology and sociology, as I could not comprehend why people develop a sense of community. Since young, I had no way of integrating into any groups or communities. I did not understand why people could have such strong links with others. It was not until very late that I learned that this was because I did not know who I was, so I could not become a part of any groups.

Taking the bus to wander around Taipei City, I went to chat with black Muslims and the Imams in mosques. For religions that did not exist in Taiwan, I would read books or search for more information online. My loneliness increased my demand for knowledge. Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Buddhism, Christianity, etc. I wanted to know what these religions were and what made the believers willing to become a part of the community. It was natural for me, who looked neutral-gendered, to be the typical target for admiration by the lesbians in a girl's school, but I never managed to enter the lesbian community. The affectionate looks from many schoolmates only made me feel them as incomprehensible, but this kind of indifferent attitude sparked more affection. I did not understand what they wanted from me, and I could not make myself a part of the lesbian community. I made girlfriends and wore corsets, but I did not feel like I became one of them. I continued to be excluded from all sorts of communities in senior high.

Entering the university, I was still an isolated person. My attendance rate was so low that many professors in the department thought I had transferred. I was lucky to have entered an open-minded department.

To be fair, I did not spend much time on reading, but the atmosphere in the department that encouraged open-mindedness and self-reliance rebuilt my interest in gaining knowledge, despite it once being destroyed by the Joint College Entrance Examination. In those years, I took all courses in the six faculties in the university, from Chinese literature to pharmacology, from architectural history to criminology. There was a seeking, a longing for 'infinite truth' and a curiosity about 'life', which motivated me throughout most of my 20s.

The change in my life came all of a sudden. I first saw the term 'transgender' on the library's computer. It was like a lightning strike in my head—"Oh!" a loud voice in my head cried, "that's absolutely right!" At that time, I still did not know much about transgender people, but the more I read about the entry for FtM (female-to-male), the more excited I was. I had a strong instinct shouting to me that I had finally been accurately understood. I have a name! And I belong to a certain community! These unnatural, alienated, anomalous feelings had a reason and a name! At that moment, an enormous world burst out in front of my eyes on that small, old computer monitor in the library. I instantly contacted the development team of the website which was the Center for the Study of Sexualities. Through Josephine Ho,[2] I began the journey of exploring my sexuality.

Three

While I was rapidly developing my sexual identity, I got to know God in my bright third year at university.

Just as I managed to be the loner in every community, I walked into the church on my own as well. My curiosity about Catholicism was like the curiosity about other knowledge. It drove me to enrol in a catechism

[2] Josephine Ho, professor at the English Department of the National Central University, Taiwan, as well as the coordinator of its Center for the Study of Sexualities. In the parade against sexual harassment on May 22, 1994, she shouted out, "I want sexual climax, not sexual harassment," and it caused a sensation. She is one of the pioneers of the women's movement in Taiwan. She has a clear stance, including support for the rights of sex workers. Her research focuses on pornography culture and sexual minorities. She is welcomed by many sexual minorities, and some homosexual communities in Taiwan regard her as their godmother.

class that claimed to allow participants to learn about Catholicism in a "systematic manner." Joining the catechism classes was like taking part in a joyful class. I felt relaxed and pleased. Every Friday evening was like an announcement of the upcoming weekend. I came to the catechism class, chit-chatted with others, and enjoyed the two days off. The round building behind the church resembled a tower. I entered the quiet gate, walked up the dark spiral stairs, and there was the warm and bustling catechism class.

Halfway through the catechism programme, something happened. At that time, I had a girlfriend with whom I had been for many years, but it was coming to an end. Before one of the catechism classes, we had a serious quarrel. We began to quarrel with each other that evening. I was tired and frustrated, and I was thinking about the catechism class.

"Anyway. I need to go to the catechism class..."

"I won't let you go! You sure can feel calm and peaceful there, but what about me?"

I froze, not just because of the maliciousness behind this question, it was also because it made me conscious of the feeling I had never noticed before. In peace. Did I really feel in peace in the catechism classes? What did that mean? I suddenly asked myself.

I still rushed to the catechism class that evening. I did not know why I needed to rush. When I reached there, it was already 9.30 pm, and everyone was preparing for the ending prayer. I joined the prayer with a chaotic mind. But many smiled at me. No-one blamed me for being late. I did not remember much about that ending prayer, but I always remember the one leading the prayer praised the Lord and said, it was the ending time but there was still someone willing to hurry and join us for the ending prayer. A profound peace and love filled the small room. Children's paintings and crafts from the daytime Sunday School were hung on the wall. A dozen adults were sitting in the cramped and mismatched chairs. It was silent but peaceful. I experienced God's presence.

The catechism programme went on as usual, and I unconsciously switched from being a 'curio' to a 'seeker'. One day shortly after New Year,

I had a mystical encounter.[3] I realised I was not only loved, but I also had faith. After finding love in Jesus, things became simple to me, just like how being attracted to other women was natural to me. I accepted Jesus in my life without any resistance, but the Church was a problem.

From the very beginning, I always treated my faith with earnestness and seriousness. After careful consideration, I told the catechist about my sexual identity. Not surprisingly, my application for baptism was rejected. But unexpectedly, a series of hurtful incidents occurred to me. The catechist told every catechumen about my sexual orientation and declared in front of them that even if I found a priest who would be willing to let me receive baptism, I would never be able to receive the Eucharist in this Church. He even said that someone like me, even after baptism, would only receive the sacramental character[4] but not charism.[5] Experiencing these hurtful lectures from the church, I put aside my baptism. I said to God, "I do want to join your Church, but your Church rejected me. I remember all of their names, and I will tell you on the day we meet. These people are..." I was so deeply wounded. How many faith-seekers were hurt by them in the name of love? My childhood impression of Christianity had finally been confirmed: this is nothing but a narcissistic and arrogant community.

I put aside my baptism, watching other friends from the catechism class receiving theirs. I left the spacious, ornamented church on my own, quietly after the Easter celebration. I went there alone, and I left there alone as well. In the following eight months, I was led by God to talk in the wilderness. In the wilderness, there were no partners, no churches,

---

3 Mystical experience, a practice of religious ecstasies.

4 Sacramental character includes seals, symbols, and sacraments. In the early era of the Church, it was physical symbols and marks in rituals created by the Church related to the life of Jesus and the gospels. In the Catholic Church, there are three sacraments, Baptism, Confirmation, and Holy Orders that give the receivers an indelible imprint (see *Theological Dictionary: A One-volume Encyclopedia of Christian-Catholic Theology* (輔仁《神學辭典》增修版) edited by Fu Jen Theological Publications Association, 704-5).

5 Generally refers to the blessing given by God to an individual or a community, same as salvation and eternal life. In a narrow sense, the meaning of charism is special grace and gifts, such as wisdom, knowledge and confidence (see *Theological Dictionary*, 713).

no support, no theology, liturgy or scriptures. I did not even pray. In the wilderness, there were only me and my Lord. My gender and desired partner were a fog that could not be understood or described. The interior of my solitary room was so small, making me so close to the love of God. This room was also the wilderness, so vast and far-reaching, with not a single soul in sight. The initiation of my faith in God was love, but the starting point was loneliness.

Four

My baptism was delayed indefinitely, but I knew I was already deeply attracted by Jesus. If I had to suffer such pain to seek him, then so be it! I still attended the Sunday Masses on my own. The retreat experience before the baptism left a deep impression, and hence I went for an eight-day retreat during summer vacation. At that time, I was not yet familiar with prayers and Catholic teachings. Outside of the small group of people I knew from the catechism class, I did not know any other fellow Catholics. I was in my infant stage of faith. I talked to the old nun about my tragic past in the counselling room. There are only two scenes in the retreat that I still remember to this day.

The first was one evening when it was too hot in the church. I could not sit still inside, so I went out and sat down on the staircase in front of the church. I was painting the scene where I was talking to Jesus in my mind. Jesus was standing in a field of blooming lilies and spoke to me. The evening wind brushed my face, and I was thinking of Jesus in the dark. I wandered around Jesus, like a five-year-old playing around his parents. Jesus smiled at me, holding a bouquet of lilies in his arms, enjoying the breeze with me. Jesus did not tell me what was right and what was wrong, but he showed me with the Bible, "Yet I assure you that even Solomon in all his royal robes was clothed like one of these. Now if that is how God clothes the wildflowers growing in the field which are there today and thrown into the furnace tomorrow, will He not much more look after you, you who have so little faith?" (Matthew 6:29)

Another scene was in the counselling room. I told the nun that I was starting to wonder why people ever joined the Church. I did not understand the relationship between my faith and such a church. In

the small counselling room, the foreign nun listened to my story with a gentle look on her face. Her hoary head was groomed neatly. She rested her wrinkled hands on the gray skirt covering her thighs. She looked kind and mild and eager to hear the youthful me telling her all my stories. That was the first time I did not feel discriminated against or humiliated, but rather, I felt like I was accepted and listened to—I would never have thought that later on during the countless counselling sessions in the church, whenever I explained my sexuality, it would become so agonising and embarrassing. In the end, either I had to choose to lie, or they would force me to become a liar, as if I could only be honest if I let them hurt me as much as they wanted. Maybe my true self would still seem like a lie to them.

I told the old nun about my first experience of Jesus. Jesus' love was like a fierce beast that came rushing in when I least expected it. I could not resist. But I did not understand the Church and feared the harm the Church would cause me. I perfectly described the hurtful scenario that took place once the Church knew my situation: unmerciful, unrelenting torture. They arrogantly attempted to drown me in the name of love. I could not comprehend why people needed to join the Church? Why would I need to join at all costs a community which thought I was at fault and sinful, a community that did not understand me the slightest, but claimed to hurt me because they loved me?

The nun listened to my story quietly. She looked as if she could not imagine why such a young person would experience so many rejections and such suffering. I knew it myself: because I was too much attracted to Jesus. Even if I got hurt repeatedly, I still followed my longing for Jesus. Many LGBTQI+ Christians I knew had left the Church or had converted their faith into an intimate and private relationship with Jesus, giving up on the relationship with the Church. The nun did not offer me many consolations after hearing me out, and she did not discuss these matters which were actually unable to be resolved. She raised her head, looked at the distance, and finally her gaze landed on the Cross.

She looked at the Jesus on the Cross and said, "Jesus loves you as you have experienced. But he also loves others. Jesus is calling you, and he is also calling others to build the Church."

Her words shook my world and reminded me how much I was

focusing only on my own relationship with Jesus, to a point that I forgot that his love extended to people I might or might not know, people who might or might not accept me. I also forgot that Jesus called me to come to him, and he also called us, humans who are imperfect, to form the Church. The Church is not just a church of people. It is the Lord's Church. That was all I needed for a reason to join the Church: Jesus is the only reason for me to join the Church. I did not need other reasons. I did not need perfection or the promise of being loved. I did not even need to consider any potential suffering. I only needed this one and only, perfect reason. Jesus was the initiation of my journey of faith, as well as the destination. If that was his will, then I would gladly join the Church. As for other matters, they could be put aside for now. At that moment, I was once again being embraced by the love of God.

It made me recall the prayer that sparked off my determination to be baptised half a year later.

In November of the same year, I still had baptism in my mind ever since I missed the chance at Easter, but I did not actively seek another opportunity. Then one day the priest giving my course took the initiative to ask if I was willing to be baptised on Christmas Eve. At that time, I was not mentally prepared for baptism, not to mention that it might happen in a month's time! I asked for a week to think it over because I did not know if I could keep this lifelong commitment. For me, baptism was like marriage, a matter that was lifelong, unchangeable, non-cancellable, non-regrettable. I was only 22 and I had yet to make any lifelong decision like this. It made me even more anxious.

I took a day to pray in the church. Kneeling in front of the statue of Mother Mary, I started praying, but in my heart, I was not sure if I could get any sort of revelation if I stayed like this for a longer time. Praying was still a slightly vague concept for me. It was not as crystal-clear as what the catechism class described: the Wi-Fi connected to God. After kneeling for a long time, I even carefully eyed the golden hem of Mother Mary's clothes. I started to light up each of the little candles laid in front of the statue. There was a cheap-looking set of noctilucent Rosary beads hanging next to the pew. I could not recite any of the five Mysteries of the Rosary, so I stared at the cross in a daze. The light irradiated from the candles flickered in the dark, quiet church. With the noctilucent

material, the cross on the Rosary looked as if it was shining bright. As time passed, the candles gradually melted, forming many small glowing puddles. Some candlewicks drooped over after some time of burning, so I gently straightened them up with a matchstick, and tried to adjust the deforming candles. Over time, it was inevitable that I caught some hot, melted wax. Even though the burning sensation was still there, the wax was already solidified. I peeled the wax bits off my skin, flicked them back to the pool of melted wax. I could still identify their shapes the moment they fell in, but soon they melted and merged towards the candlewick, disappearing in the puddle.

At that moment, it was like my head was tapped.

When the wax bits stayed on the outside, they maintained their form. But when they approached the burning candlewick, they must be melted. If one only relies on himself or herself, he or she must never become a good Christian. But if one relies on the grace of God, he or she must succeed. We are the wax bits. If we keep ourselves close to God, we can be melted in him, and become one with many other wax bits. If we rely on our Lord, we will never be solidified.

God's revelation came from an ordinary thing, but it completely lit up the entire space. The prayer changed my hesitation and concerns, so I received my baptism on Christmas Eve one month later.

Maybe the journey of faith was like that—doing things that normal people dare not do—while many others stayed away from religions, Christians approached Jesus. When Jesus was suffering, all the people present were standing away from him, like the people Moses[6] had led. At the holy mountain that was not to be approached, when it was finally allowed for people to come near, no-one dared to come forward; only Moses, who had an intimate relationship with God, walked up the mountain. This drew a permanent line between other people and Moses. This was an absolute difference, with no gray areas. To cross the line, there needs to be love. Staying behind the line means only betrayal. A Christian's life should be like this as well, because "the kingdom of heaven is forcing its way in, and men of force take it" (Matthew 11:12).

---

[6] Moses, the leader of the Israelite people. He received the Ten Commandments of God on Mount Sinai. See the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament.

Five

Once I became a believer, I knew I was destined to be hunted like many great prophets in the past. That was why I avoided any group activities and always left my English name instead of my real name. Very few people knew my real name. After the baptism, I changed my name half a year later as though I was trying to escape. "I am scared of anyone remembering me. Please forget everything about me. Please let me go."

After being baptised, I thought I could relax for a little bit. But during those days when I was a new Catholic and did not have any close friends, I still underwent many attacks from others. I heard that the tutor from my catechism class had told others about my 'invalid baptism', and how I only received the sacramental character but not the charism—of course this was because of my weird sexuality and sexual orientation—so I could never receive the grace of God. I thought I was already finished with these petty attacks, but they never seemed to stop.

It was a long and painful process to build up a life of faith on my own.

I was always different from other young people. I enjoyed silence more than bustle. I enjoyed praying more than group activities. I liked theology, traditions and the Bible. I felt a strong attraction to God at an early stage. But was it possible for me to live a consecrated life? Would God give me a religious vocation? My Lord, for what reason did you call me to come here? I liked to gaze at the Tabernacle in the empty church, maybe say something or maybe not. Time spent with Jesus seemed always to pass quickly. I did not think I could take the path of a religious life but my strong desire made me wonder.

At the same time, a young person who kept making stays in a monastery was sure to be noticed. Many priests and nuns have, directly or indirectly, asked me about the idea of a monastic life. I did not know whether they were treating me as a man or as a woman, and I did not know if they realised what was special about me. I had been evading the issue of a vocation. I was afraid of entering a Christian community, because I feared that everything would be taken away from me the moment I revealed myself.

One afternoon during the winter vacation, I was working as usual

in the field that belonged to the monastery. The nun working beside me asked,

"XX, have you thought of a monastic life?"

"Me? I don't know. Is it possible?"

"I see you enjoy this life."

"What do you mean by that?"

"It seems natural for you. You seem happy. Both working and praying seem easy for you."

"Is it supposed to be difficult? I just like doing it."

"In the past, there was a saying for vocational discernment: if you sleep well, eat well, that's a good vocation."

"I do sleep well and eat well..."

After struggling for some time, I finally told the nun about my situation. The result was that she told me that I did have a clear vocation, but if I started to make alterations to my body, that would be breaking my vocation. At that time, I was about to return to society, and was going to undergo the initial process of sex reassignment surgery. That day, I fled the monastery. I could not bring myself to return for three years, with a deep, deep wound.

After leaving the monastery, due to different circumstances, I talked to three different counsellors about my possible vocation. But every time, after I explained my sexual orientation, the problems that were not there suddenly came into existence:

"You don't understand monastic life."

Yes, I did not...

"It's special that you like celebrating the Liturgy of the Hours. My daughter said God told her to do so as well. Did God invite you as well?"

God did not talk to me...

"People with a vocation are all very certain. If you are not sure, it's not a vocation."

Oh...

"You enjoy the monastery for the atmosphere, right?"

I went to the monastery to pray...

"If you are unsure, that means you don't have a vocation."

I was unsure because of you...

My voice became weaker and weaker, until completely muted. In

those agonising days of being denied, no one told me that I did not need to answer those humiliating questions. Love does not require a reason. Love is the root of everything. I did not understand more about my relationship with God after hearing from those tutors, but rather started to suspect that God loved others more. Why did God never talk to me? The winter vacation ended with the horrible experience with the counsellor, followed by months of being unwilling to enter the church. Even when Easter came, I still could not enter the church. Was it possible that people like me should never become Christians? Why, why, why...? Every time I tried to believe that some counsellors were experts on counselling homosexuals, or professionals on vocational discernment, or specialised in gender studies, it always ended up with me being hurt. Every time I ended a painful counselling relationship, I had to suffer months of internal conflicts and a low ebb of faith. In the twinkling of an eye, 14 years had passed, God was yet to speak to me.

Would God give me an unrealistic desire? What does he really want from me? Up to this day, I still do not know.

Six

My church life was not always negative. I actually got to know a lot of accepting fellow Catholics. Some were new believers, some were long-time Catholics, and some were even priests and nuns. Every time I was accepted by someone, I learned a new way of faith. Since they could not comprehend my situation, I found it difficult to understand why they came to accept my special physical and mental conditions. Many fellow Catholics and religious persons had never heard about transgenderism. My changing my sex and having a girlfriend were in direct contradiction to the ethical beliefs of Catholic teachings. I soon realised that among the people who accepted me, many of them were in effect saying "let's put aside matters I do not understand," so they could give me a place in their system of faith—they did not understand why God made many people like me, but they allowed me to talk about my relationship with God. They were just trying to accept me as a brother with a complicated story.

Being accepted, I experienced the most important elements in the Catholic faith—humility, love and the Grace of God. I believe that both those who accepted me and those who hurt me were placed considerately

in my life by God. He wanted me to have more chances to experience him, to get close to him. Because of these people, my own concept of love was expanded, and I also saw the love of God when I looked back to the path of faith I had taken. At the catechism class, even with the hostile attacks and gossip from the tutor, I made some friends with whom I still keep in contact. They love me, stand up for me, and walk with me on the journey of faith. And there was a priest who was blamed by others for baptising me, and another priest who enabled me to keep a low profile when starting the first LGBTQI+ catechism class. There were many nuns and friends who have been praying for me and have helped me to sustain my faith. During the journey, God has let me know that his hands have always been by my side, holding me. On many occasions when I experienced something I did not want, I thought about avoidance. But he called me so firmly and clearly that I could not leave him. When going through my toughest days, I frequently prayed in the church, because only the Eucharist could comfort me. Once after my prayer in a small church, I was leaving with my girlfriend. I stopped at the door, turned and gazed at the Tabernacle. I sighed and said the person by my side, "I really love Him." Perhaps for many people who hate me and the 'sins' they see in me, my presence is some sort of blasphemy, but that sentence was the most profound summary of my life as a struggling believer.

Many people think that sexual minorities ignore God's will, only focusing on satisfying their own desires. But to be honest, whether it was before or after learning about God, I felt terrible being part of a sexual minority. I wished I could be like other normal people. My hardship did not come from a hatred for my special nature, but rather from the interpersonal barriers and the difficulties I had to face because of them.

According to the Catholic catechism, the sexual minority is meant to live in chastity. I thought about this many times: is it really the answer for people like us? My final answer was: no.

First of all, God gave me a unique trait. Just like many Christians who search for the meaning of their lives, I need to develop on the basis of my own trait in the hope of discovering my unique vocation. The superficial vocation might change: just like Mother Teresa initially joined the Sisters of Loreto, but later created her own Missionaries of Charity. No one would say it was a mistake for her to have become a member of

the Sisters of Loreto. Similarly, no one would say her vocation changed either. Her vocation was to become a light on Earth, and her way of responding to that vocation matured and was transformed. There are so many gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, hermaphrodite people in the world. The reason why they were created must not consist only in overcoming their unique desires: God does not create people just so they can be tortured. If a sexual minority does have a unique desire, it might seem simpler just to bottle it up—not so easy in practice—but the more appropriate thing to do is to integrate this unique trait into the person's life, so they can discover the meaning of God's plan.

Besides, I believe that the current three types of vocation in the Catholic church—marriage, celibacy and consecrated life—are all God's vocations. Each of these three vocations has its own divine significance and none is better than the others. You should not choose marriage just because you cannot maintain abstinence; or choose celibacy because you cannot find someone to love. Vocational discernment is a process of being close to God, discerning God's calling and deciding to answer. That is why no one in charge of vocational discernment should act like an analyser—a young person gets put through an analyser, so the machine can show whether that person has a vocation. The role of spiritual directors is not to put approval stamps on young people's foreheads. They should accompany youths so they can come closer to God and find their right direction. That is why no individual should be urged to follow a certain type of vocation because of one of his or her traits. Otherwise, it would come down to forcibly replacing the work of God and taking away the freedom given by God, not to mention the fact that it would be a huge humiliation to people choosing celibacy. Celibacy is a vocation, a divine call from God and an active, generous response from the people choosing this path. It is never the only option or a collection bin for people who cannot be classified.

Once, after a few years of not seeing each other, I met the nun who made me determined to get baptised. At that time, I was burning with the desire for a consecrated life. We sat in the small meeting room in her monastery. The nun asked me:

"If God wants you to accept your identity as a girl and live a consecrated life, what will you do?"

"Are you saying I am 100% sure God wants me to become a nun?"

"Yes."

"Impossible! How can I be 100 percent sure of God's will?"

"Can't you?"

The meeting room returned to silence. I lowered my head and thought about it for a long time. Eventually, I answered with a sorrowful tone as if I was choosing martyrdom,

"I will try my best... If that's what God wants."

The nun replied lightly, "I think God won't ask this of you."

I suddenly felt relieved. I was glad and confused at the same time.

Seven

Regarding changes in the body, the opinions of Catholics can be very extreme. While many open-minded Catholics have accepted homosexuality, because they believe it is given by God. Under this logic, they cannot accept me, because I apparently do not accept the body God gave me, and I even used technology to change its form, to take away my important reproductive organs.

Sometimes I do thank God for blessing me with this identity. It allows me to understand the minorities and makes me a gentle person. I become a very good listener, listening to the secrets of many. Among these people who trust me with their secrets, some know my sexual identity, some do not. I never have a chance to ask these people who do not know my identity but are willing to tell me their secrets: "Why? Why would you trust a young man with your deep, deep secrets?" But among them, I got to know many souls who are struggling in life, feeling confused and painful. They are better than those successful priests, spiritual counsellors, religious or rectors at letting me understand that life does not have an easy answer. Maybe only in a universal church do I get to witness and hear stories from so many 'sinful people' that I never got to know in the past. Many of these Catholics are homosexual or transgender. Some of them had an abortion in the past or are currently involved in an affair. There are also Catholics who were infected with HIV. Some are even gay priests or religious brothers who abuse drugs and indulge themselves during holidays, some are lovers of current priests, others are sons and daughters of ex-priests. Of course, there are

also countless young Catholics who are struggling between faith and sexual desires.

Some may say, these people's problems are different: some made a mistake once, but others made mistakes over and over again. Others may also say that some problems are innate, whereas others are conscious choices. The fact is, these stories were not meant to be cautionary tales, nor were they intended to show the scales of justice. On the contrary, they showed me how broken a life could be, and when I looked back to the broken part of my own life, these stories enriched my understanding of the world, allowing me to experience the individual difficulties of others. Whenever I heard someone who seemed to be successful telling me his or her hidden secrets, I realised all souls were equal when faced with their own problems. God is fair, and we all need salvation.

It is difficult to define the stories of others as a fable of life. I can only keep listening, keeping them company. They may not often have a chance to talk about their life experiences. Maybe they cannot bring themselves to speak out loud. Maybe they do not have a chance. Maybe they are not expressive enough. Everyone has their own darkness and brokenness. We little human beings need the company of Jesus, because life can never be without death and darkness. Only in God will there be true light.

On the path to salvation, I have met many good Catholics. What I mean by 'good' is that, they insisted on praying and believing in the goodness of God even if they could not stomach themselves. They understood that God knew and accepted the parts of them that they could not even accept themselves.

The Letter to the Romans says, "Hope that is seen is no hope at all" (8:24). These people relied on their trust in God. Even if they could not see hope, they still continued walking on this path. I do not mean that transgender people's difficulties in gender identity or sexual orientation are a darkness awaiting salvation. But rather, when they became the true source of my suffering, they were not outside of my faith. On my journey of God-seeking, I brought along the agony, the difficulties, as well as the grace and blessing resulting from these difficulties.

In the first few years after baptism, I went to church keeping a low profile. When the gender reassignment was completed, I was finally relieved and joined the community with a new identity, getting to know

new friends. My unique sexuality was like an invisible thorn under my clothes. No one could see it, but I knew it was there. The reason why my gender became a thorn in my side was not because its nature disturbed me—my original gender disturbed me, while my new gender makes me relaxed and happy—but rather because I knew that to the Church it represented disobedience and a misdeed.

The process of my gender reassignment was slow, so my transitional period spread over several years. The most uncomfortable thing was not hiding my original gender—I had been playing very well in my new gender, so no one knew I was a transgender. The most uncomfortable thing was in fact this perfect representation of my new gender.

This is very contradictory. Gender reassignment and gender identity have been the two most important parts of my life. On the one hand, I did not want others to know my original gender and because of that treat me differently. On the other hand, I could not share with others the tremendous change in my life and the many resulting physiological and mental difficulties in adaptation. I might have tried to gather a group of real friends in the Church so we could support each other in life, but since they did not know what I was experiencing, what was the point? The most essential support system of my life would lose its effects. For instance, when I started my hormonal treatment, I faced a lot of drastic physiological changes, with much emotional turbulence, but I had to maintain a normal life. Another example was soon after the surgery, because of the suboptimal placement of the drainage tube, I suffered bruising. I often woke up in the middle of the night because of the pain, but no one knew.

Gender is often merely a background in many people's lives. They may not even realise the influence their gender has on them. But gender to me has been the main theme that entwined my life. For so many years, I have been asking myself: what does God want me to do? And the answer must say something about my gender. I remember the first time that I had a girlfriend who was a fellow Christian: I was very anxious. In the past when I had non-Christian girlfriends, we seemed to have a wall between us, that held back the crusaders from crushing in and judging us. While I respected the different religious backgrounds of my ex-girlfriends, this difference also protected them from facing

the judgement of the Church. I have come to accept the fact that once I tried to escape from my original gender, which had only brought me pain, I was destined to be seen as a hardened sinner, an adulterer, that the mainstream discourse condemned to go to hell. I have been carrying this burden for a dozen years, so I did not wish this on my beloved ones, and I certainly did not want them to feel guilty or sinful. I did not want to be the cause of their sins. All my girlfriends were heterosexual. If I truly believed the Church's doctrine regarding evil would weigh upon them, then I would find it difficult not to blame myself for it. If they were heterosexual, then why did they need to be with me, a sinful man? We could not marry in a church. Our love would destine them to hell, even if they did not violate the doctrine. The one they loved was a man, me, but they would have been crucified by the so-called Christians who claimed to be pious. This is why I firmly believe that Catholic doctrine does not apply to non-believers. If my girlfriends were not Catholic, they could get away with it.

I thought of myself as having an educated intellect with a modern mindset regarding gender and capable of independent thinking. But when I was faced with the Christian discourse regarding the sin of homosexuality, my obedient Catholic thinking inside me still shook me. This worry evolved into anxiety: what if I was wrong? What if she could have loved a normal man, but because of me, became sinful? If it wasn't for me, her love would not have been an issue. In the past I had always evaded the problem by hiding behind the shield of 'mutual respect for each other's religious background', but when I first dated a Catholic girl, this wall of excuse came crumbling down. I did not know how to approach this issue, until one day I finally told her about my anxiety. I said I was afraid of harming her. If I was destined to go to hell, then so be it: I was born with this curse. But I feared turning an innocent soul into a sinner.

That girl embraced me and said that I did not make her a sinner and that I hadn't done her any harm. It was all her own choice. She used her faith and love to make me understand that she did not think I was sinful. Even though I had a lot of friends who accepted me in the Church, she was the first one who, as an intimate partner, made me feel that I was completely accepted, that I could communicate with another being, and

that I was loved and blessed by God. I realised how good it felt to share the same religion with my partner. We could communicate within our faith. I did not need to give up the possibility of being with another Catholic just because of the wall of excuse of 'preventing sin'.

Because of this experience, I also realised more deeply how the Church's discourse regarding sexual minorities planted the seed of fear in our souls. Even adult baptised Catholics like me, who thought to have come prepared, still suffered from it. If a Christian is to be honest, when there is a conflict between sexual orientation and faith, it would be impossible to tell which hurts the most, their soul or their faith, because the two are inseparable.

Eight

I spent a lot of time writing this article because my dozen years as a Christian had its ups and downs. I had many setbacks, but I also experienced the Grace of God. I want to thank God for calling me more strongly whenever I encounter setbacks or am at a low ebb. In the darkest hours, I spent almost all of my leisure time in the church.

At the same time, there is another concern that affects me. I have been worrying about whether I have explained it clearly both in detail and in depth. Among Taiwanese Christians, there is quite a large number of homosexual people, but few transgenders. Transgender people are a minority of a minority. Because of this special situation, many transgender Christians are leaving the Church. In the past, I received some invitations to write a book. I realised that transgender people's condition is very difficult for normal people to understand, and it easily causes conflict with the belief system of normal Christians. That is why, no matter how much I try to explain, they always stop at the point of saying, "It is unacceptable." Taiwanese transgender Christians are the absolute minority, and they certainly do not have enough opportunities to express themselves, and most people know too little about them.

Many transgender people choose not to come out, because they have a unique advantage: most transgender people, before receiving gender reassignment, are on the outskirts of all sexual minorities. But once gender reassignment is done, they suddenly enter the mainstream heterosexual group.

Except for the transgenders who are very 'queer' or determined to take part in the LGBTQI+ movements, or those who are attracted to the same sex after gender-reassignment, 'coming out' is very unwise for them. After coming out, the gender they want to assume in a low-profile life, or even just a simple intimate relationship—all that will no longer be possible. Many people judge others according to their original gender. No matter how hard the transgenders try to take on the gender they desire, once they are exposed to the public, it usually means every effort they have made will come to nothing. Needless to say, the majority in the Catholic Church are always opposing them with the idea of gender 'given by God'. Few people think about whether their peculiar gender-identity conflict could also be given by God. Could there be conflicts in what God has given? Is it just because it is still too difficult to be integrated into the larger picture in this era? What is the meaning of God creating so many sexual minorities in this era?

The conflict between our physiological and mental gender-identity is obvious, and that is why many people object to the idea that our 'abnormal' mentality could be given by God. In their worldview, God does not create imperfect, disharmonious beings.

But is 'contradiction' equal to imperfection? Is 'difference' equal to disharmony? I have been devoting my somewhat 40 years of life to trying to integrate my own experience, seeking consistency in contradictions, integrating differences into harmony. Who can define the 'perfection' and 'harmony' of God? And who can claim that their life is nothing but perfect and harmonious? I would rather believe that while God was creating me, he wanted me to spend more time pondering my physiology and my mentality, but in His eyes I am still a perfectly harmonious soul just like the others. I am always working with Him, listening to Him, during the highs and lows of my life. Maybe God's 'perfection' is not built on the absence of pain or absence of troubles—as Jesus shows in his life—but rather built on the constant approaching, listening and believing in God and other people.

This year is the Jubilee of Mercy. The Pope wrote in his Bull of Indiction, "Charity demanded this no less than did truth." This is exactly the attitude of many people towards sexual minorities. With these tens of thousands of words of my life story, I want to invite you all to rethink:

what does 'truth' really mean? Is it the doctrine accumulated over the past 2,000 years? Or is it a modern interpretation of theology? I believe, God's truth transcends time and language. Church teachings or their interpretations are not the essence of truth, or at least not the whole truth. Truth goes beyond time and language. Truth is the core and destination of salvation for a Catholic.

I believe that truth is God's love, and our complete openness and answers to God. In our responses to God, we answer the invitations of love from Jesus. Not only invitations to love God, but also to love ourselves as God's creation, together with all other beings in the world. Love may be one-sided, broken, or even full of prejudice and limitations. But we can still go beyond our defects by accepting others, integrating the broken parts of ourselves, and hence understanding that the salvation of God shines through our weaknesses throughout our lifetime. We at least can respond to him with our limitations. As for the others, God will make up for it.

Take Up Your Cross and Follow Me

Frank Tsen-Yung Wang,[1] *Taiwan*

> "Gay marriages are special not because they are gay, but rather because they manage to break the shackles of the outside world, and vow their eternal love before God, with their dignity as images of God."
>
> "I do not deny the necessity of these social norms and orders created by categorisation, but I have always questioned the way these 'norms' exclude some experiences, and I also believe that these norms are often meant to be transcended through the demands of love."

As a university professor, I have always expressed my opinions as an expert scholar. However, when facing my homosexual identity, I cannot discuss or analyse homosexuality objectively from a researcher's perspective, because I have to face it every day of my life. To me as a Catholic, homosexuality is the Cross I have to bear in my life. It has been my agony and death, but it also brought me rebirth and hope, shaped me into the person I am today. I am willing to follow Jesus and take up my Cross without hesitation.

I am gay

Every time I confess that I am gay, it takes a lot of courage. It is never easy. When I was 29, I came out to a friend of mine that I met at a society of university students. I asked him to meet me at the campus of National Taiwan University after dinner. I chose to meet him at night because it would spare us both from reading each other's expressions in that darkness that comforted me. If he had not accepted it, there

[1] Frank Tsen-Yung Wang is an associate professor at the Graduate Institute of Social Administration and Social Work, National Chengchi University.

would be no need to see the disgust in his expression, as long as we went separate ways ever after. He knew I had something to say, but I found myself unable to talk about it, though we had already circled the campus a few times. Even though I came painstakingly prepared to come out, the air was almost like a solid stone, pressing against my vocal cords. Even though my heart was groaning in pain, I could not let out a sound. The heaviness was caused by the fact that I was about to violate all the inertia that was embedded in me by living in a heterosexual society for nearly three decades. Saying those words would be a complete break away from my own self. I needed to overcome the fact that I did not have the courage to face the conflicts and fractures accumulated over a long period of time.

Becoming invisible

Once many friends had learned about my sexual orientation, they often asked me, "When did you know you were gay?" Then they asked, "Are you sure you are gay?" Usually, males would stop at this point. Most females would make an extra comment, "It's a pity!" Or maybe depending on the marital status of the speaker—unmarried women would say, "Why are all good men gay?" and married women would say, "It's a pity you are not going to have children!" There were even some elderly women who would say, "If I was 10 years younger, I might help you give birth to a child." It was comforting, because they were simply pampering me. But most of the time I could only brush it off with a smile, because they did not understand how rough it has been, and I have no intention of playing the bitter role.

I have two sisters, and I am the only son in my family. Since my youth I was like many others, thinking one day I would meet a girl I loved and get married, giving birth to our sons and daughters, extending the Wang family line and allowing my father to be relieved. But as I grew up, I realised I was different from my expected self. When I was watching a *007* movie, I was not focusing on the wonderful figures of those Bond girls, but rather on the muscular, hairy chest of Sean Connery. In senior high school, when my friends started to date girls, I was confused and puzzled by my strong feeling of loss and jealousy. My adolescent bitterness had no outlet. Even if I wanted to talk to someone

about it, there was nothing in the language to name it. For homosexuality never existed in my world at that time. I knew how I felt about the same sex, and I knew it was not right. I did not know that was called homosexuality. Later on, I finally learned that I was not alone, that there were a lot of gay people out there. But I had become a gay man living in a world which turned a blind eye to homosexuality: I was trying to become invisible.

Denying my own self and hurting others on the path of affection

I started to hide my feelings of the truth that 'I am gay', reviewing whether my behaviour was within social norms from time to time, only fearing that others might find out the secret about me. In senior high, I had to concentrate on studying in order to enter a good university, so I could not date anyone. At university, I kept myself busy with managing club affairs. Every time a girl showed me her affection, I could only distance myself from her since I did not know how to reject her. In the end, that hurt them more deeply. Before graduation, I convinced myself "Maybe I should try dating someone—maybe I can still be with a girl." I did not want to let my family down, and hence I had a romantic relationship with a girl, even though I felt like we were just good friends. When she started to talk about marriage, I rushed myself into coming out under great pressure, ending up hurting her deeply.

After that, I saw myself as not worthy of romance. Any man I loved would never love me, and I could not return the affection to women who loved me. I thought God must have been joking with me. I had no expectations for my life. At that time, I had the darkest plan for my future: after fulfilling my responsibility of taking care of my parents for their remaining years, I would end my own life.

Carrying a secret I wanted no one to find out, I built a high wall to shield myself from the outside world. I feared that people approaching me would only end up revealing my well-hidden secret. I learned to take good care of myself, not to let others worry. But at the same time, no one had a chance to get close to me, to love me. I guarded my secret alone, feeling like I was the only gay man on Earth.

Witnessing to God in prayer

Entering my thirties, I still struggled to deny my homosexuality. I again attempted to date a girl, in the hope of becoming a heterosexual person who was accepted by society and could get married in the Church. My third year into my job after returning home with a Master's degree obtained abroad, the pressure for marriage again drowned me in my own deception of self-hypnosis, making me unwilling to accept my homosexuality. I met my second girlfriend who was exceptionally gorgeous. After learning about my homosexuality, she was willing to suggest a sexless marriage. She believed that in love, she could bear such sacrifice, even though at the back of her mind, she was still hoping God would listen to her prayers and turn me into a heterosexual. With her encouragement, I sought help from a Jesuit in the church, Fr Richard Wang, who was well known for spiritual prayers of healing. Fr Wang was a graceful elder whose words were always moving. That was why I had great hope for his healing.

On the day I entered Fr Wang's office, I hoped that through spiritual prayer I could become 'normal'. During the prayer, Fr Wang asked me to imagine being embraced by the Blessed Mother and by St Joseph respectively. I said, "I felt suffocated by the breast of the Blessed Mother." Fr Wang deduced from my response that the reason I became homosexual was my father's negligence of my mother, which caused my mother's projection of her own unfulfilled desires onto me. At that time, I was way past the stage of asking "Why am I gay?" Knowing that the cause came from my mother did not make me feel any better. Instead, I wondered what I could even do with the fact that my mother had recently died from breast cancer. I still had most of my life ahead of me and blaming my mother did not help me face the rest of my life.

Fr Wang invited me to pray sincerely, hoping for the cleansing and healing from the Holy Spirit and the blood of Jesus. After the prayer, Fr Wang embraced me. At the end of the Mass, Fr Wang usually wished every fellow Catholic peace, and hugged them one by one, so I thought it was normal. But Fr Wang asked me after the embrace if I had any projection of sexual desires when we were hugging each other. I was stunned for a moment, looking at Fr Wang who was already in his sixties,

and thinking to myself, "You are not my type. I am not into old men. I certainly feel nothing for you!" But I did not want to hurt him, and so I only gave a short reply, "No." He was really excited, "Alleluia! Our prayer is starting to work!" I then realised Fr Wang was testing if my sexuality was starting to change, but I was even more puzzled: it seemed that in the eyes of Fr Wang, gays were like beasts, who would desire anyone as long as they were other men. I was not attracted to Fr Wang just as many heterosexual men are not attracted to old women. I did not refute him on the spot, but I asked, "Why do I need to alter my sexual orientation?" Fr Wang replied, "It's too tough being gay in Taiwan!" I did not know where my courage came from, but I questioned him, "If God made me a gay man, why am I trying to change it with prayers instead of trying to accept it? The day before Jesus was crucified, he prayed in the garden. At first, he was praying that God could waive his suffering, but in the end he accepted God's arrangement and followed his will. God never tells us to stop just because the path is rough. Doesn't God want us to take up our cross and keep going forward?" Fr Wang did not say much afterwards, and I never returned for more 'healings'. In the process, I realised the ridiculousness of 'seeking treatment for homosexuality': I handed my life over to an outsider to judge and decide, hoping that another person would save me, instead of bearing my own responsibility. Because of my rejection, I hurt my girlfriend who was willing to love me. Because I could not accept my own self, I could not share my inner world with my family and friends who loved me, and I became an isolated individual. It was because I believed that if I admitted being gay, I would be cast aside and lose everything. That was why I denied my true self, and let myself fall into the predicament of being unable to love and be loved.

Decision: Even if I lose everything, I still have God

The conflict between my inner self and the external expectations came to a head in the process of developing a relationship with my girlfriend. I was facing the choice of being my true self or being a 'heterosexual' who fitted with the social norms. After the failed treatment, I flew to the United States to visit a gay friend, Lee Ming-wei, who was living in San Francisco and had already come out. He is currently a well-known

conceptual artist. He was the only gay friend I had at that time. I needed to see another living gay to know if there was any hope in his life. I stayed at his place for a few days. One night, he had a long dialogue with me through the images that appeared in his mind. This conversation changed my entire life and helped me see thoroughly the situation I was in.

First, he saw a window with golden light shining through. Then he looked inside and found out that it was a space filled with gold and jewels. Looking closer, he realised they were all made of plastic. He asked if it represented anything. I said, this house filled with gold symbolised my current self. It seems that I had everything (good appearance, excellent academic qualifications, high intelligence), but if I could not face my true self, I actually had nothing. To fulfil external expectations, I lost the honesty to face myself. My friend continued to describe a piano in the house. A girl was carefully playing the piano. She could only see the notes, but not hear the notes. I responded, "This girl symbolises my girlfriend, who was spending her life with me, but could not receive my resonance." My friend suddenly said, "There was an image about you, but I could not see you." Pausing for a moment, he said, "I found you. You are hiding in the closet in the corner of the bedroom. Your entire body is blue, curling up like a baby." I knew very well that I had been hiding in the corner on the path of life because I dared not face myself. I had spent all my life so far putting on a faked front. My friend said at last, "Do you know? I see you stretching and standing up. You have the image of Jesus shining above your head." At this point, I burst into tears, because I knew that even if I was spurned by the entire world, Jesus Christ would still love me. I was created by him and I was the one and only me in the world. In the process of coming out and admitting that I was gay, God's love gave me the strength I needed to face myself, to face the ones I loved, and to face the potential attacks on my homosexuality from the outside world. These attacks included the rejection of homosexuality by the Church. But my heart remained calm and peaceful, because I was taking up my own cross, and I was learning to accept it, just like Jesus Christ.

Unblessed wedding

After coming out, I met my former boyfriend. After being in a passionate relationship with him for half a year, I went abroad to study for my PhD. The bitterness of a long-distance relationship made us realise how important we were to each other. After knowing each other for nine months, we decided to hold our wedding at Ming-wei's home in San Francisco on Christmas day that year. There were only a dozen good friends attending. We did not know how to plan for a gay wedding, so we had to design our own. On the day of the wedding, the only thing we knew was that we were getting married, but we had prepared nothing. In the early morning, the homeowner Ming-wei asked us where the wedding hall should be. I took out the Chinese character 'joy' cut out on red paper that I brought for my eldest sister from Kuangchi Bookstore at Cardinal Tien Cultural Center in Taiwan a year ago, putting it on the most obvious pillar in the living room. That made it the front of the wedding hall. Ming-wei brought some red ribbons, making them into two ribbon balls. He hung one on the pillar, another being the bouquet we held when we entered the hall. In the morning, we wrote our oath to each other at the dining table. In the evening, San Francisco's sunset coated the home with golden light, showering everyone in the winter sunlight. Ming-wei's partner and my eldest sister were the officiators. The main body of the wedding was the oath we made. When I read the oath, I immediately choked in tears, because I remembered that my deceased mother had said that she had suffered greatly because of her poor relationship with her mother-in-law, and she understood the agony and would accept my wife, sparing her the same pain. Now I was getting married. I believed the spirit of my deceased mother must be watching over us, and she must accept my partner as she had promised. To us, this couple of 'sinful men' who were denied the right to love each other by society, this moment was so hard to attain. Every guest at the scene was crying, and they came up to give us their gifts and blessings. Ming-wei joked, "How come your wedding looks like a funeral?"

An attending gay guest whom I did not know told me after the wedding, "I had already given up hope on love, but you two reignited my confidence. I believe love between gays is possible." If a wedding is meant to prove to others that love is possible and to prove God's existence, then gay people who have been deprived of their marriage rights by society

are undoubtedly the group who most need the Sacrament of Marriage.

I recalled someone had written a description of Heaven: "People in Heaven, regardless of gender, age, race, love each other. Despite not wearing clothes, they are not ashamed, because clothes are excessive. Everyone was made by God in his own image." In Heaven, people are no longer restricted by outside social values. They can love each other freely. Gay marriages are special not because they are gay, but rather because they manage to break the shackles of the outside world, and vow their eternal love before God, with their dignity as images of God. Regardless of your view on homosexuality, from the direct perspective of faith, if we truly believe that 'God is love', then how is it possible that God refuses to bless these couples *who love each other*? How is it possible that they displease God? Let us who long for love be blessed by God despite all kinds of discrimination in society. Let 'heaven' be on Earth one day.

Congratulations from my Father

After having decided to face my true self, the most difficult thing was to come out to my family, especially my father. I have always been bearing the expectations of my parents. Since my early years, I have been the first in class in exams, become the model student, participated in the Oral Recitation Competition, been appointed to be editor of the senior high school journal, gone on subsidised exchange programmes, from National Taiwan University, then Columbia University to the University of Toronto. I have always been the good son who made my parents proud. Letting my father down was the last thing I wanted to do. He was optimistic and humorous, with a wide circle of friends. He was the kind of person who would always try his best to hold on to his dignity. Having to face my father was the toughest part of accepting my homosexuality. Before my wedding, my eldest sister had made a move to stop me, because she thought I could not have a wedding without notifying my father. My father had always been hoping to attend my wedding. I told my sister that my wedding would never be in the past tense. Rather it would always be in the continuous tense. The wedding ceremony for my father could be held after he accepted my partner, if he wanted to. After listening to my words, my sister then agreed to attend my wedding.

I returned to Taiwan during the winter vacations after my marriage.

I left my wedding photos in my room, because I knew my father who was living on his own would go to my room from time to time when he thought of me. I did not have the courage to tell him, but I hoped he would, wittingly or not, see the photos and I worried about it at the same time. The year after, on a cold morning just before the Chinese Lunar New Year, I took a stroll with my father just as usual. As we were stepping out of the door, my father patted my shoulder from behind and said, "Congratulations!" I paused for a moment, thought to myself, "Does he know?" But still, I decided to play dumb, "What are you congratulating me for?" My father replied, "Congratulating you on your marriage!" And he strode forward. I was stunned on the spot, could not believe my own ears. Mixed feelings arose from the bottom of my heart. On the one hand, I was relieved: my father finally knew, and seemed to have accepted. I stared at my father's back, with tears running down my face. I hurried up and caught up with him. On the other hand, I felt sorry for him, because I did not know how many sleepless nights he might have been through to be able to say that to me. Just as I was alone on my journey of facing my homosexuality, my father must have experienced the same lonely journey trying to accept it. I did not know how he managed to walk through that journey with no one to talk to (my mother had already passed away five years earlier). What I knew was that he loved me deeply, and hence he was willing to accept something that did not exist in his world. A 70-year-old man had to relearn everything about homosexuality and congratulate his son for his marriage. The flexibility shown by my father on the matter of homosexuality was beyond my expectations. When teaching elderly welfare, I always told my students never assume the elderly must be stubborn and thus underestimate their ability to accept novel things. But when it came to my father, I dared not expect too much from him. Seeing my own age-discriminative mindset, my father made me feel ashamed.

But my father's blessing did not last. When he faced my partner, he actually did not know what to do. Even though my partner gave him presents at every festival, every time my partner visited his home, my father would leave the living room silently, unwilling to interact with him. The pressure from relatives questioning my marital status also stressed him, making him feel like he was losing his dignity in

front of relatives. After his retirement, the loneliness of living alone in old age started to make him wish that I would marry 'properly' and have children. My father was always upset, sometimes angered, about my regular arrangement to spend nights with my partner. He was unwilling to accept the fact that I was living-in with my partner. As both parties were unwilling to give in, the once-close relationship I had with my father was becoming more and more strained. Every time we talked about my decision not to marry, or the fact that I had already married my partner, my father would say, "This is abnormal." And the conversation would stop.

It must have been the most embarrassing thing to be considered 'abnormal' by my dearest family member. Of course, I could counter him and point out that he had given life to me as a gay, but I did not want to hurt him further. I do not blame my father for not accepting homosexuality. His words reflected the opinions of many. I believe that he loves me, and love will lead him to overcome the hatred of homosexuality built up by the world. It is just a matter of time. Human society has created a lot of dichotomies like 'normal/abnormal', 'good/bad' and 'right/wrong'. It is just that I belong to the 'abnormal' group in this case. I do not deny the necessity of these social norms and orders created by categorisation, but I have always questioned the way these 'norms' exclude some experiences, and I also believe that these norms are often meant to be transcended through the demands of love. I gradually learned to thank God for giving me this experience of being excluded. It puts me in a position closer to people who suffer. I get to see social discrimination in action. Without it, I would never have been able to breathe life into my role in the field of education and research in social work.

After a period of stalemate, I began learning to understand my father. Every day when I was heading out, my father would ask if I would come home for dinner. I no longer insisted on telling him that I would go to my partner's home, forcing him to accept my intimate relationship with my partner. Rather, to make him happy, I would tell him that I would be coming home for dinner. After all, he only wanted the company of his son. Eight years ago, he entered the early stages of dementia. Every day, I spent time with him before I needed to head out, just to make him

happy. When he saw me preparing to go out and asked if I would be home for dinner, I would tell him, "If you kiss me, I will come home for dinner." My father, being a retired policeman, would never accept this kind of intimate act. He would answer: "No! No!" And then I would give him another option, "It's fine if you don't want to kiss me. How about if I kiss you instead?" He would refuse again, "How can you do that!" Then I would go to him, and hug him and kiss his cheek despite his protests. Every time I kissed him, I thought to myself: "Dad, I love you!" If you forget everything after all, then the last thing I want you to forget in your life is the feeling of me kissing you!

With love, my father gave his blessing to my gay marriage. Similarly, with love, I let go of expecting my father to accept my partner. With love, we both let go of our insistence and complete each other.

There is no fear in love

Discrimination is not only about exclusion by individuals. Systematic discrimination is often more lethal, but most people are not aware of it. Being discriminated against by one person, you still have someone you can protest to and argue with. But people living in systematic discrimination often see it as their own fault rather than the system's. Those who are not gays may not understand the harm done by systematic discrimination, because most of them take existing human rights for granted. When I was studying for my PhD in Toronto, my partner also came later on to Toronto to study. I wanted to apply for a dormitory for married couples, but I was worried that gay couples might not be accepted there, despite my classmate telling me that gay couples were treated equally at the University of Toronto. I was still sceptical. Hence, when I was filling out the application form, I intentionally used the Chinese-translated names instead of our English names which could indicate our gender. When I was submitting the form, a working student in her 20s only took a look and accepted it. I could not help asking, "My partner is also a man. Is it really okay?" She looked up with confusion and said, "Of course it's okay!" Her expression seemed to say, "Why do you ask? It should not be a problem at all!" I quickly said, "Okay! As long as it's fine!" She might not understand the cultural shock I experienced from being treated equally for the first time. After all, the

person standing in front of her was a Taiwanese who had never thought that homosexuality would be treated fairly. That day I almost ran out of the office overwhelmed with joy. I knew in Canada I could let go of my internal fear. I could be myself, with no need to hide or become invisible anymore. I finally experienced what is meant by freedom without fear!

I have been with my partner for almost 19 years, but our oath to take care of each other and stay together has not been recognised and can be denied at any time. The simplest example is when we travel abroad and stay in a double room in a hotel: most hotels would arrange for two single beds. Whenever we request a double bed, we worry about how the staff views us. If it could lead to us being discriminated, we would rather move the two single beds next to each other ourselves. If we want to form our own family, we cannot adopt any children, because we are not an officially married couple. If one day I am involved in a car accident, the hospital or police will contact my emergency contacts, who would be my father or my sister. My partner would not be informed by the police. If I had not come out to my family, the dearest person in my life might end up being the last to know my situation, and I might end up not being able to see him at the last moment of my life. Even if he makes it in time to the hospital ward, he might be refused entry because he is not a member of my family. If one day I cannot take care of myself anymore, he would not be legally allowed to be my guardian. He could not inherit my wealth. If one of us dies first, the house we are living in would be inherited by the family of the deceased. If the family decides to auction the house, then the remaining one would be evicted. When we grow old and need to stay in a nursing home, how could we let the nursing home know of our relationship and allow us to stay in a room as a couple? Or would we have to pretend to be roommates to be living together? What scares me most is that, when I die, my partner might not be allowed to attend the funeral because of our irregular relationship. He would not be able to accompany me on my final journey in life and be comforted by others. How regretful it would be for both of us! What have we done wrong to deserve such suffering?

When the LGBTQI+ community requests to be treated equally, people start to worry: would it be encouraging homosexuality? And

then they proceed to discuss "the problems of homosexuality." I do not think homosexuality is a problem. It is the way society views homosexuality that is the problem. I am speaking as a gay myself: I only want fair treatment for the LGBTQI+ community. Let us enjoy the same rights that heterosexuals have, because we all are in the image of God, all temples of the Holy Spirit. But I am no longer disappointed by the discriminative system built by human beings. Even though the fight against such a system seems so long, I see Jesus bearing the Cross in our journey. I am gay and I am also a Christian. If being gay allows me to see Jesus, then that must be a calling from God to be gay. I am willing to follow in Jesus' steps loyally.

In the beginning I said, "This is my life," not some textbook discussion on moral values. It means that I have to face the social judgements on homosexuality every day, and aim at balance throughout the experience, finding a way for me to settle down. My greatest reliance is that God loves me as He loves everyone. Homosexual people often hide behind the walls they have built through fear of stigma, unable to walk into other people's lives, and unable to let others enter their own lives. When I accepted myself, opening up to let love guide my life and be true to myself, that was the moment of God's blessing and grace. Whether you approve or reject homosexuality, I want you to witness my true existence.

My Child Is a Tongzhi

Mrs Kwok, Taiwan

Taipei in the 1960s was relatively simple and conservative. If it was not for my mother who once taught in a Catholic girls' school, I would never have had the chance to know God. When I was 13, I stepped onto the beautiful campus with excitement. Six years of residence on the campus changed my life.

Since my parents had no religious belief, at that time I felt fresh and was interested in the statues of Mother Mary, the prayer before meal and Mass. In my second year of senior high school, I began to receive catechism classes but not with certainty if I really understood. For a while, I attended Mass every day and felt fulfilled. In senior high, I was impressed by the tutors at Kuangchi Program Service during the summer holiday. They made me want to be baptised. Once after a Mass, I ran into the nun who was the principal at the time. She asked me kindly, "You look like a fellow Catholic. Have you not been baptised yet?" But I passed up the chance, missing it a few more times until I met my husband. His family were all Catholics. I thought God had opened the door again and I should not miss the opportunity again. I was baptised before our wedding, starting our stable marriage and family life under His care.

I knew I was not a good housewife, not good at either housework or cooking. Thankfully, my husband was very understanding and took up most of the responsibilities. However, I was particularly serious about my role as a mother. Since being pregnant, I had been following a plan. I was proud that both of my kids were raised following parenting books, including pregnancy music and pre-school education, along with parenting classes and all sorts of educational theories and experiments. These reminded us that a life that was blessed by God needed to be cared for with our best efforts.

As is the experience of every parent, the challenges of raising children were unimaginable. It started with my older daughter not appearing and behaving a girl. It was not easy to give her the space of freedom. I thought God wanted us to break the stereotype and accept an unconventional child. However, when she came out at 15 telling us that she liked girls, it was really a huge challenge. At that time, I was most troubled by the lack of information, which made me and my husband go through a period of anxiety. I asked God repeatedly in my prayers: "What should I do? Why does it have to be my child? This burden is too heavy. Can you take it away from me?"

The life stories of individual gays are all very different, but they are never ordinary, never simple. There is no template for children. Self-exploration often stumbles, and thus their parents are also nervous. Adolescence and the pressure of making friends, along with her unconventional appearance, academic stress and setbacks from not being recognised—all these resulted in interruptions of my daughter's studies. This brought an unforgettable dark period to our family. I remembered the small wish I had at that time: I would be happy if she could just graduate from senior high school. Nothing else would matter. At that time, our relationship was strained, barely talking to each other. When I recall that period now, we were not sensitive enough to support our child. Maybe we underestimated the shock and stress resulting from a homosexual identity.

From that time, I started to get to know the LGBTQI+ community, learning more about their life and culture, and learning to be a more competent mother to a *tongzhi*. Theories or scientific reports were of little use compared to face-to-face exchanges in real life. It is only through knowing each other's life and emotions that acceptance with empathy is really possible. At the same time, God made me see His love for His children, making me realise: God loves her more than I do. What is there to worry about? The mission of parents is to help their children find the reality of life and identify themselves, love themselves and love God. Because of this insight, we understood her transgender nature. We let her explore and adapt to transgenderism, hoping our child could get closer to their most comfortable nature, living out *his* true self.

I was fortunate to have been cooperating with many LGBTQI+ groups, which led me to understand the difficulty of their efforts to be seen, to fight for equality and to seek their rights. I also understand the bitterness of the LGBTQI+ people hiding in different-sized closets. Coming out is the daily hard work of every LGBTQI+: who is friendly? when should I come out? These are all unknown. Parents especially are often the biggest source of stress, and hence whenever I see LGBTQI+ people alienating themselves to avoid coming out to their families, or when I see parents anxious after learning the truth, it fills me with great pain.

For more than a decade, I have been working hard non-stop, hoping to help more LGBTQI+ people and their families to live a better life, and also hoping for chances to speak to society and government departments about providing a friendlier and fairer environment for the LGBTQI+ community. I have always been lazy and weak, not used to showing up in public. My actions have also caused my family distress. But I know very well that it is a mission worth my efforts. Although I always bargain with God and I have fled compromise out of fear, He has been giving me strength and courage to walk my path. If I, being so ordinary, have anything insightful to share, it would only be God's grace for LGBTQI+ people.

For all these years, I am grateful to God for His kindness and patience. I never doubt that God has His special plans for his children. Moreover, I believe that the diversity of sexuality and gender is definitely God's will. It is just that most heterosexuals, especially Christians, do not understand this yet. They have not had a chance to learn about homosexuality. Not having the correct information becomes a blind spot of faith. Many distorted remarks and prejudices plant the seeds of misunderstanding and discrimination. This not only hurts LGBTQI+ people and their families, it does greater harm to their own faith and values. How much effort would it take to unravel these tainted visions and deviated values? I hope that the Church can gradually open up and listen, truly accepting all brothers and sisters. I also hope to continue working hard, letting more people understand that the life of every LGBTQI+ person is unique and honourable. They are all treasures of God.

Unconditional Love: Heartfelt Words From a Father

Mr Kwok, Taiwan

My child never liked wearing skirts. She was very active from her earliest youth, coming home all sweaty and with dirty clothes already in kindergarten. I did not mind it too much. But it was only when she came out to my wife at 15 that I finally understood.

I was no stranger to homosexuality due to my psychology major in university. But when it happened to my own child, I still felt overwhelmed and did not know what to do.

I went back to my alma mater and found an old classmate who was working as a counsellor for students. I told him I needed to talk to him. He was after all an experienced counselling teacher, and his remarks opened my eyes. He said, "Old Kwok, you have a blind spot. You two should be proud that your child is brave enough to come out, because he trusts his parents. That shows you are successful in your child's education." My old classmate also told me that what my child needed the most was parental love and support.

My child had a rough path of education. In senior high, he was 'counselled to transfer' by two different girls' schools because of his behavioural problems, such as smoking. This was a euphemism for dropping out. I did not have proof if it was because my child was dressing up like a boy, even becoming the crush of schoolmates, which caused him to become an 'unwelcome person' in these schools. Fortunately, a private senior high in Taipei was willing to accept him. I sincerely appreciated the teachers and instructors of that school. They not only allowed him to dress in pants like the other male students instead of in skirts, but also saw the excellent side of my child. He is

kind in nature, has a good foundation in English and mathematics, is helpful and has leadership skills. The teacher chose him as the class representative. After graduation, my child enrolled in a national university and became the glory of the school. After graduating from university, he continued his studies and continued working on the campus after obtaining a master's degree. He has now bought an apartment with his girlfriend and made plans for their future. He can work well and live well. I feel that the burden is not so heavy now. It is really nice.

I think that I need to thank God for allowing my child to walk his path safely and smoothly. I am grateful that God protects our children and supports us parents in a wonderful way. God set no conditions for his love to us and our children. Homosexual or heterosexual, transgender or not, graduating from university or not, having a higher degree or not, whether our current position at work is high or low, our income high or low... none of these affect God's love for us. Naturally, my love for my child is equally unconditional.

Macau

Walking in Sorrow With the Lord

Serrafina, Macau

Dear brothers and sisters in Lord, it is my pleasure to have a chance to share my story with you all. I would like to tell my story because I hope to be able to ease the pain of other gay Catholics through my sharing and let you know that the pain you suffer is not misunderstood by everyone. You are not alone! More importantly, I hope my sharing can reflect God's love for us. I believe God loves us gay people!

Born in Macau, I am a girl who loves dressing in a feminine way. I was brought up in a Catholic environment. My family and I would attend Sunday Mass every week and pray together at night. I loved hearing the story of Jesus from when I was young. My favourite class in school was the catechism class. I would try to follow in my daily life what I had learned in class. At that time, I just really wanted to do something to please God and I did not understand why I was the way I was. It was like any child's desire to please their parents and obtain their approval. I regarded Jesus as my big brother at that time and always call Him 'God'. From the age of nine, I spoke often to God. I would share what I was feeling with God no matter whether I was happy or sad.

My parents often quarrelled at home. Seeing my parents quarrel made my child's heart hurt. But I dared not express my uneasiness and sadness to my parents. I also did not dare let my companions know. I thought they would ridicule and discriminate against me. Thus, God became my only shoulder to cry on. At school, my schoolmates went to the playground to play ball games after lunch but I preferred to go to the small chapel in the school to talk to God.

I would also tell God of the joy in my heart whenever I got any special presents or good grades. My relationship with God has become ever more intimate since then. Although my parents' discord surely

had some psychological influence on me, so far I still feel that my sexual orientation is not related to this. They finally divorced and have new partners, but they are still friends. Sometimes, both families dine together.

Looking back, I remember that when I was in primary school I was always full of envy of other females. Every time I saw them, I would have a sense of joy and delight. At that time, I did not understand the concept of love. I only knew that I felt very happy whenever I saw them. When I was in high school, I began to understand the feeling of falling in love. I was secretly in love with classmates several times. I would watch them playing in the school's sports field and wait for them to pass by just to be able to gaze at them. In my mind, I fantasised about falling in love with them. Yet in reality, I did not share my thoughts with anyone, because I feared they would think me strange. Although I learned for the first time that I might be a lesbian at that time, I still repeatedly asked myself why those I loved were different from those loved by the other female students. I was afraid to let others know my sexual orientation not because it conflicted with my religion, but simply because I cared about how others thought of me. I was not bothered by conflict between my religious beliefs and sexual orientation, because I had not yet realised that homosexuality was a grave sin in Catholicism. As I recall, I seldom heard discussion about the evil of homosexuality in my school's catechism class or in Sunday School.

One night, when I was 14, I decided to tell my mother frankly about my feelings; I always thought that there should be nothing to hide between mother and daughter. Also, I hoped deeply that my mother would be able to explain my confusion. My mother, in my mind, has always been a strong woman. Any time I had problems, she would be able to help. Unfortunately, my mother's response disappointed me. She said, "It is really very strange that you have this idea. Don't think too much about it. Of course you are not a lesbian, because those who have this idea are psychologically ill." I continued to try to convince my mother how real and strong my feelings were. Yet, it seemed as though she did not want to try understanding my feelings. She seemed to evade reality, and has never asked or discussed this subject with me since.

My thoughts stayed deep inside of me. I hoped one day I would be

able to find out the real reason for my feelings. When I was 18 years old, I went overseas to study. Studying abroad opened my eyes, and made me understand more deeply my life goals and values. There, I got to know other LGBTQI+ friends. It was the first time I could share my true feelings, and the first time I felt I was being understood. Studying abroad also made me feel homesick for the first time. The loneliness and solitude made me realise how painful it must be for those who live in the world without any relatives or friends. The subjects I studied and the internship I practiced during my time abroad made me realise that I did not want my future career to be limited to making money or doing business. Those jobs that focus only on making money made me feel empty and dissatisfied. Strange to say, I could not feel God's presence during the days of my internship. Since then, I have longed for a job that is meaningful while simultaneously allowing me to feel God's presence. I prayed to God, hoping that He would inspire my way.

One day, I went to a bookstore, wanting to get some inspiration from books. I strolled around, and some words on a book's cover suddenly caught my eyes. These words—'be my light', 'joy of love' and 'night of the soul'—touched my heart. I started to read the book. My intuition told me it was the message that God wanted to reveal to me. I thanked the Lord that this book gave me a first insight into the life story of Mother Teresa. Her selfless dedication, her service to the poor, and her gift of meeting the poor and the lonely abandoned by society in the book deeply touched my heart. After a few days of reading and understanding, I began to aspire to be involved in this kind of service, as well as to build up my habit of reading more religious books. Whenever I read those books, my heart felt particularly at peace and my emptiness would be comforted. If I have to choose a favourite book, it would be *The Passion* (2010).[1] The loneliness, embarrassment and sadness of Jesus discussed in this book touched me so deeply that I longed for the first time to dedicate my life to serving God. And I wished that my heart could be a refuge for the Lord, to comfort God and to be a resting place for God. Jesus' reflection described in the book also made me feel God's presence

[1] A spiritual book published with Imprimatur of Archbishop René Fernández Apaza of Cochabamba, Bolivia. It was originally published in Spanish.

strongly for the first time, as if He talked to me directly. The thought of being a nun grew stronger and stronger, but I knew that religious vocation is a very serious decision, not a joke. I decided to give myself more time to think about it. I also decided to learn some skills so that I could use them if I had a real chance to serve the poor in the future. So I transferred to a Bachelor's programme in nursing. I was very thankful to God for inspiring me to find my purpose in life. I encountered lots of difficulties in my studies. After all, nursing is no easy task. But through prayer, effort and faith, I completed the programme with courage and perseverance given by God.

It was in reading 'The Right Arm of Hell' in Mary Katherine Baxter's *A Divine Revelation of Hell* (1993) that I recognised how big a sin homosexuality was in Catholicism. The book said, "They called this act love…. These were lovers of their own flesh more than lovers of God. They were men loving men, and women loving women, who would not repent and be saved from their sin. They enjoyed their life of sin and spurned My salvation…."[2] This deeply shocked me, and I began to ask myself continually, "If I fall in love with someone of the same sex, can't I love the Lord simultaneously? Must I fall in love with the opposite sex to be qualified to say I love the Lord? If my love for the same sex obviously does not come out of adultery or greed but comes from the spirit of sacrifice and loyalty, then why should my love for them be considered immoral by the Church?" Although my heart was full of sadness, disappointment and many unanswered questions, I decided that until I got my answer I had to follow the Church dogma to prevent myself from continuing to fall into sin. I was convinced at that time logos must have come from God, and that all decisions made by the Church must also have come from the Holy Spirit and God. I tried my best to convince myself to believe I was actually like what the book said, "These were lovers of their own flesh more than lovers of God."[3]

---

2 Mary Katherine Baxter was a woman ministry of a small denomination in the United States. Catholic believers are not recommended to read such apocalyptic book which has not yet been authorised by the Church to publish, as the Catholic Church has official guidelines for private revelation.

3 Ibid.

In those days of trying to be 'straight', I attended more Masses and prayed constantly, kneeling before God to help me change my thoughts and feelings. I also tried to avoid watching or reading perspectives, movies and online forums which supported homosexuality. Whenever I saw females who attracted me on the street, I forced myself to divert my attention to avoid temptation. Yet, no matter how hard I tried, I still had strong feelings for females, which sometimes made me really hate myself. I was eager to reconcile with God and also hated myself for having such an orientation. I went to confess, telling the priest my sexual orientation. This was the first time that I could not stop crying during confession. Fortunately, the priest did not blame me. He said he could understand my difficulties and asked me whether I had a partner. I said 'No'. He then explained that homosexuality was not a sin in the Catholic faith, although homosexual behaviour was. He also told me to pray more, and to talk to a counsellor.

After the priest's words, I started to find the courage to accept my feelings and sexual orientation. I was also convinced that people with a homosexual orientation were called to chastity and that if they remained single, there was no crime. Finally one day I screwed up my courage to share with my mother my sexuality and said, "Although I really like girls, I know that homosexuality is a grave sin and will choose to be single the rest of my life, so you can rest assured." My mother seemed very comforted and said, "It is good that you understand, and it will be okay so long as you don't sin anymore." In fact, however, every time I thought that I was going to live alone for the rest of my life, or thought of dying alone, I would feel very sad.

I continued to make every effort to be single, asking myself to live a chaste life and forcing myself not to have special feelings for females. Unfortunately, I could not control my feelings. I knew that God did not blame me for having such feelings; however, I did not let myself have such feelings because I did not want to trap myself on the brink of love and pain. In my heart, I would love a female deeply but at the same time I knew that such love should not be expressed. In my heart, I was very eager to feel her love but at the same time I knew that such a desire was a sin. Who could understand how painful it was to be in such conflict with oneself? I had always wanted to find homosexual Catholic friends

so that we could comfort each other, because I thought only they could fully understand my inner conflicts. But I had not yet met any.

One night during those days of self-restraint, I collapsed in tears. This was a night I would never forget. That night I felt that no one in the world could understand me. I felt very lonely. In my heart, I cried out to God: "Lord, why you don't change my orientation? Why can't I love whom I love? Why does nobody love me? Why does my mother, who is so close to me not understand me or care about my psychological condition? Am I a sinner in your sight? I'm such a loser! I am a failure whether in love, faith or affection!" I cried desperately to God, "Lord, if you want, take my life now! I don't want to live in pain. I've had enough. If you do not want to, then can you make an exception and appear once in front of me? I won't tell anyone. I really need your arms to hold and comfort me now. Can you do something to make me feel your presence? I feel so very lonely." Tears kept flowing endlessly. I fell asleep exhausted from crying.

Of course, I did not see God, and convinced myself that it required patience to wait for God's response. The next morning, when my heart was still in turmoil, I suddenly got a message on my phone from a friend asking, "Are you alright?" With the feeling of hitting rock bottom, which made me no longer care about the consequences, I told her in full detail about the difficulties I was facing. My friend was also a Catholic, and her reply astonished me. She told me that she had also gone through what I experienced. Although she had not revealed anything to her family and friends, she was happy to share it with me. At that moment I knew that God had not forsaken me. When I sought consolation from him, he would one day comfort me. To make a long story short, this friend really helped me a lot psychologically, perfectly understanding the psychological hurdles I had always encountered. She also shared her years of experience in exploring the Bible and explained why she believed there was in fact no conflict between homosexuality and faith. In wavering between doubt and belief, I pleaded with God not to let me fall into the trap of believing false reasoning. Then one day I read a very convincing book, Matthew Vines *God and the Gay Christian: The Biblical Case in Support of Same Sex Relationships* (2014). This book fully answered my questions about chapters and verses of the Bible,

and explained clearly and in-depth that we had not fully understood the meaning behind the logos and were mistaken to assume that homosexuality was a sin.

Now I am 24 years old with a steady girlfriend. Before I decided to be with her, I kept asking God, "Do you want me to develop the relationship with her or not?" However, we eventually developed our relationship. When I spent time with her, I unexpectedly felt a sense of happiness, peace and security that could not be expressed in words, and not the slightest sense of guilt. Being with her, I seemed to see God at my side smiling at and blessing me. A sense of guilt did, however, come from my concern for my family's love: I felt incapable of meeting their expectations and felt sure to make them sad. In order not to agitate them, I felt compelled to lie and conceal the fact that I was going out with my girlfriend. My mother sometimes would not go to Mass because of her anger towards me, which made me feel guilty. My parents, needless to say, did not accept us and even said awful things to us: "Do you know exactly how sinful you are being? You should go to confession at once… Look at you, like a whore… Why do you do obscene things? Are you the devil?" These words hurt me deeply. When I said bravely that "I am not wrong! There's nothing wrong about being gay! God accepts us!" my mother slapped me in the face. At that moment, I did not protest because my heart was completely broken and I couldn't stop my tears. Ever since childhood, my mother would not talk to me for a long time whenever I did something she thought was wrong.

Now if she found out that I was meeting my girlfriend, she would become angry and cold towards me. She even refused to talk to me and said she would not attend my graduation ceremony. I was at my wits' end, not wanting my relationship with my mother to be like that. I was crying non-stop and, once again, screwed up my courage to confess and share my feelings with my mother. I told her frankly that her remarks and coldness to me were hard for me to bear. I tried to express that my love for the same sex was in fact the same as most people's love. I said, "I have always tried my best to be a good person and, no matter what, be kind to others. But I see that as long as I go out with girls, I am an evil person in your eyes. You have even said that I am good to others not out of sincerity, but simply in order to get into heaven. I am really hurt when

you think of me like that." My mother's answer left me disenchanted. She said, "Whatever you say, wrong is wrong. I would rather you die alone than sin, lest you end up in hell."

In retrospect, I think I went through self-denial and self-acceptance expecting that the moment I came out of the closet I would start a new stage of my life. Before I came out of the closet I always thought that as long as I came out and was true to myself, everything would be fine: it would be like the sun coming out after a rainstorm. But it turns out that if you cannot get your family's support, you will still face lots of humiliation even after coming out of the closet: being monitored on your daily behaviour, facing indifference, disappointment, condemnation, and so on. I sometimes still ask God, "Why me?" Until, praying one day, I came to a realisation. I suddenly remembered that in those days when I longed to devote myself to the service of God, I had said to the Lord, "If you allow, as long as I am capable of easing your pain, I'm willing to endure any form of suffering, because it could be a way to express my love if I could share your pain without complaining." Since then, whenever I feel wronged or hurt verbally, I meditate on Jesus' sufferings. He has also experienced such verbal humiliation and rejection, as well as frustration, loneliness, disappointment, etc.

When you feel that no one understands how you feel, when you have done no wrong but others still consider you unforgivable, understand that Jesus has also experienced this. As the Bible says, Jesus did not evil, but the crowd chose to release the murderer Barabbas and instead crucify Jesus (Matthew 27:11-16). Mother Teresa often emphasised that the words "I thirst" that Jesus spoke before he died on the cross did not just show that he physically needed to drink water. "Thirst" represented the love and care that Jesus longed for in his suffering. So whenever I suffered, I reminded myself to meditate more on Jesus' suffering. I can say that so far my cross has been enduring the pain of being a gay Catholic who must bear many sufferings brought by the outside world. Although it may take some more time to achieve equality for the LGBTQI+ community, and I worry about the future, I often remind myself to believe in God! He will certainly take care of me! Finally, being able to walk with the Lord in misery is indeed a kind of grace, a thing, indeed, to be thankful for.

Overseas

Yearning for Love

Francisco, South Korea

I had a good friend when I was in the fifth grade. His whole family was Christian and he told me a lot of Bible stories. I found him very interesting, so I went to church with him and gradually joined the Protestant Church.

Although I was once fond of girls, I have loved to look at boys since my childhood. I confirmed my sexual orientation was different from others when I was 16. In the summer of my third year in junior high school, a fellow student studying for matriculation and I were inseparable. I am an introvert, but we fell in love over time. I didn't know whether he was also gay, but the feeling between us was so strong that we completely did not care about the gender of each other. This was my only confirmed relationship.

When I identified myself as gay, my inner struggle was intense as I knew that Christianity opposed homosexuality. I tried to restrain myself, but I fell. I repented again and again. When I first came to Korea, everything was fresh to me and I had a wild period. I even suspected later that I contracted AIDS. I fasted and prayed and went to the hospital for the lab test result a week later. Luckily, I learned I was not infected. But the fear was profound. From then on, I ended my wild private life.

As a Protestant, I had been taught that "Catholicism is a heresy, is the Whore of Babylon, a religion that worships Mary."[1] However, by chance,

[1] After the Reformation, the Protestant Church developed a lot of criticisms of Roman Catholicism. with the turning of pages of history, however, the ecumenical movement is in full swing among Christian Churches, and the denominations are gaining a deeper understanding of each other. There are fewer and fewer Protestants who continue such criticisms. However, many Protestants in mainland China continue to attack the Roman Catholic Church with extreme zeal because of the influence of the

I walked into the Myeongdong Cathedral of the Archdiocese of Seoul. The solemn atmosphere inside the church and the sacred music made me feel for the first time that God was close to me. Then, I saw a statue of the Virgin Mary. Her motherhood added a touch of tenderness to her Son, Jesus.

Thanks be to God, I met the family of my godfather. They are a devout Catholic family. Their humble and kind words and deeds seemed to me those of Jesus Christ himself. At his invitation and introduction, I went to the church near my home to study catechism, to learn about the history of the Church and about the many saints of the Korean Church. All of these were things I had not heard of in the Protestant Church. I also read Korean books on faith such as *Catholicism and Protestantism; Yesterday, Today and Forever*. They helped me deepen my understanding of faith.

In August 2014, Pope Francis visited South Korea. The whole nation was joyous. A movie called *Letters* was shown in the cinemas and I went to watch it. Its story of Mother Teresa and her Missionaries of Charity completely conquered me. Having attended catechism class, I received my baptism in the Roman Catholic Church on Christmas of 2015. I was reborn.

I have not contacted gay Catholics in South Korea because almost all gays here hide their identities. Thus, I still feel very lonely. When I was in the catechism class, I was deeply impressed by a story I heard. In the days when the Church was persecuted and was unable to have a seminary or a convent, a couple who wanted to dedicate themselves to God married and lived a chaste life just like the Blessed Mother and Joseph. They later died in the persecution and were canonised by the Holy See. If the Church's teaching that 'homosexual acts are a sin' is true and if gay Catholics truly have to live in chastity, I am willing to accept and pray, although it is hard. Yet I long to have such a person in my life,

---

'North American-South Korean' evangelicals, as well as the new millennial Protestant sects who are keen to explain the *Book of Revelation* to earn their own resources. Thus, many Protestants continue to see the Catholic Church with bias as the 'Beast' and 'Whore of Babylon' as described in the *Book of Revelation*. This kind of rhetoric is a great obstacle for Chinese Christians to live out unity.

too, so that we could love each other like husband and wife and live a holy life in God. In my Catholic faith I hope for this, but I hope for even more. I hope that one day gays will no longer be condemned by society and the Church, and that the Church will bless same-sex marriages. I don't know when that day will come, but I trust God because he loves gay Catholics like me.

My Dream of Evangelisation and Equality

Hu Jiahao, Thailand

> "Let us shine together for the Gospel and speak for gay fellows! Let the Church see us, let the Church hear us, let the Church touch us, let the Church know us, let the Church respect us!"

Everyone has their own dreams in life and, of course, I am no exception. Perhaps my personal dreams are more special and more difficult. But at the same time, my dreams are full of passion, full of hope, full of equality and full of love. This is my 'dream of evangelisation and equality'.

I am a Catholic, and my Christian name is Bosco. Today I live with my fiancé in his home in Thailand. At the same time, I am studying English seriously to help me one day fulfil my dream of evangelisation and equality.

When I was in the second year of junior high school, I came to realise for the first time that I was unique in liking members of the same sex. I was very clearly and strongly aware of my feelings at that time. I really liked two of my fellow first-year juniors. My attraction to them excited me and scared me too. I felt excited because the feeling of loving others is so wonderful. I was scared because most guys like girls, but why did I like boys? Was I the only one in the world like this? Why was I like this? Later, after experiencing Jesus Christ, I began to learn about Him and then finally converted to the Lord's mercy.

Not long after, there were several girls who liked me. I always had a great time with them and an intimate way to get along with them. I even invited them home to sleep together. I always treated them as my best friends. We shared the same bed but with two quilts. One day my

mother discovered it. Under the pressure of her questioning, I finally blurted out: "I'm gay!" My mother took a few seconds and asked me a question that made me feel funny and annoyed: "What is gay?" Later, she learned some basic concepts of homosexuality from one of her cousins who studied educational psychology, and became more comfortable letting me and the girls stay in touch. She was very happy also when I brought some good friends (almost always boys) to eat at home. After that, I had a boyfriend whom I now find I cherished very much. My mother liked him very much and they would even walk arm in arm in the street, leaving me alone behind them. At that time I didn't know how to behave, and I was very spoiled by my mother and relatives. I was very stubborn and self-centred. My boyfriend, who had tolerated my hot temper and constant threats of breaking up for a long time, finally gave up. Unable to tolerate my behaviour any longer he left me. In the end, I was the one who was sorry. Consequently, I had three boyfriends whom my mother quite favoured. When I proposed breaking up with them, my mother enjoined me over the phone not to be so capricious and urged me to cherish people who were so good to me. She would ask why I was still so childish and so on. But at that time, I took it for granted and I still went my own way.

Then one day several conservative priests and nuns learned that I was gay. They had a few earnest conversations with my mother. After that my mother completely changed, and conveyed her new beliefs without ceasing: "It is a sin / you will go to hell / God is almighty. You must rely on Him. He can help you quit your homosexuality..." These 'consolations' and 'incentives' jarred me and hurt my self-esteem. She even asked a priest to perform an exorcism for me. Fortunately, the priest had basic common sense. He tactfully refused my mother saying, "This issue is not as simple as you think. Pray and leave it to God..." With time I started to feel guilty. I began to feel that I was abnormal. I didn't know the meaning of being alive. I twice tried to commit suicide. I cried and prayed to the Lord for his help to quit or to let me die, but none of my prayers were answered. I hit rock bottom. I stopped going to church, gave up praying and took up smoking instead, and often went to nightclubs and hung out with a group of bad friends instead.

After another three years I discovered videos on homosexuality and gay-related Christian theology on the internet by chance. I also watched a lot of videos about science, education, and equality online and made friends with some gay brothers and sisters in the church. I also participated in some local training courses which helped me understand myself more scientifically. As I deepened my knowledge of myself, I also became more and more aware of the 'inner' meaning rather than the literal understanding of verses in the Bible. As I witnessed my own grace, I knew that the Lord loved me. The Lord's love is not narrow, and it will not be limited by sexual orientation, something as insignificant as race or skin colour. If we followed the whole Old Testament law, we modern people who wear clothes made of mixed materials and eat 'unclean' foods would all count as sinful. Modern people would be really unforgivable! But when it comes to divorce, those self-righteous Christians, priests, and pastors seem to think that it is not such a big problem. They even argue that divorce is a minor sin for which repentance is enough. Why do people of a different sexual orientation receive such different treatment? Most of the Christians who attack homosexuals do so based on hearsay, passed from bishops to the priests, and from the priests to the laity. Almost none of them have really had contact with actual homosexuals in their life, so they don't understand the reality of this group of people.

I suffered severe mental torture when I was with my mother. I also suffered violence from the male elders in my family. I started to hate my family and ran away from it. My mother was still rejecting my identity as a homosexual, but her rejection was not as intense as it was at first. In my mother's eyes, homosexuality is a kind of 'choice'. It is a life of 'choosing sin', and also an 'addiction' to sexual desire. She could not imagine that homosexuality was a kind of sub-consciousness that I began to be aware of already when I was five years old. She also couldn't imagine that I was clearly aware of my sexual orientation when I was in my second year of junior high school. She could not even imagine gay persons were only ordinary people who also have feelings and know true love. In her opinion, I was led astray by those gay people, that I got 'addicted' and needed to quit as drug addicts did.

I believe that there are many gay Christians (brothers and sisters) in this world who are like me and who are even more miserable than I was.

As we see in movies and in public videos, we all suffer the same tests of life (faith). We should be stronger, firmer, and braver. Recall what we heard from childhood: "Get up from where you fell... If you work at it hard enough, you can grind an iron rod into a needle... As long as you are still alive and as long as there is love, there is hope..." In the past, White people determined the happiness and the value of the survival of Black people; men determined the happiness of women and the value of their existence. However, those times are over! Now, the generations where heterosexuals determined the happiness of homosexuals and the value of their survival are also passing away. And they must pass indeed! Education influences people's minds and changes their hearts. People influence society and change the world. We must start from today and endeavour to equip ourselves with faith and knowledge to proclaim the Gospel of the Lord, to eliminate misunderstandings in the Christian faith, and to put an end to all prejudice and selfishness.

I have a small and unique 'dream of evangelisation and gay equality', which isn't for anyone in particular but only to glorify God, and to spread the salvation of Christ and the great love of the Father, so that everyone can live in harmony, mutual acceptance and freedom to love. May the Lord remember us and lead us to walk bravely along the way with His grace and love!

We are the gay children of our Heavenly Father and the apples of His eye. He knows who we are when he creates us. He loves us until the end. May we all accept ourselves to fulfil the life mission that our Heavenly Father has given us, and to maximise the value of our lives. May we all be able to help our Holy Church to become a better place and may we all win the crown of eternal life that is prepared for us.

Postscript

Sometimes, some Christians feel heartbroken because their churches denounce LGBTQI+ groups in their sermons. They are disappointed with the pastors and move to other churches or even stay away from the church completely. Here, I would like to raise four points to these gay Christian friends:

1. The Bible clearly tells us that "the devil is on the prowl like a roaring lion, looking for someone to devour" (1 Peter 5:8). The lamb must not leave the flock. Once a lamb runs away from the flock, it is easily seduced and devoured by the prince of this world. In order to preserve our souls and to receive love, encouragement, and strength from the body of the Lord, members of the flock of sheep should not choose to go out alone because the outside world is more dangerous.
2. We are looking up to the Lord Jesus on the cross, not someone who has limitations and makes mistakes. If we need the forgiveness of the Heavenly Father and of others, why can't we forgive the pastors or sisters and brothers in the Church who have offended us? Pray for them with the heart of Christ as you pray to overcome the constraints and pressures you face. The Lord is a thoughtful God who will make a way for you.
3. You can also find out whether there are any gay Christian groups in your locality or neighbouring districts. Get in touch with them and tell them about the constraints and stresses you are facing. Everyone will have empathy for you and take care of you with prayers. If possible, worship the Lord with others every Sunday! Join each other for fellowship, prayers and encouragement, grow together in the love of the Lord and make progress together!
4. Stay in the homophobic Church![1] Please don't be surprised as I say this and listen to my reasons: as a Christian, I love the Lord as much as you do. I also love the Church. However, we

[1] The term 'homophobic church' is not specific to any church. The editor would like to quote Father Henri Nouwen's remarks for a clearer explanation: "When we are hurt by the Church, we could not help but want to reject the Church... The challenge that we need to overcome is to forgive the Church. The Church seldom asks for our forgiveness, or at least does not express it publicly... An important point is that we shall not regard the Church as 'that place' outside but to see it as a group of weak and struggling people. We are also there, and we meet our Lord there." Fr Nouwen's did not expect it to happen during his lifetime but it did—the church expressed regret about the hurtful remarks made against gays in the past in the Bishops Synod in 2015, and has showed remorse either explicitly or implicitly on many other occasions. However, many people still self-righteously make the same mistake.

all know that the Church is a church of sinners. Inadequacies are inevitable. When the Church delivers wrong teachings and makes ignorant and prejudicial pronouncements against same-sex couples and homosexuality, all we have to do is to stand up bravely and speak for the gays! Defend same-sex love! And dare to tell them, "You are wrong! Your perceptions are mistaken! You should try again to understand." Yes, as we love the Lord and love the Church, we must bravely stand up and speak out about possible problems (prejudice, smears and offensive remarks)! Help the Church reflect on itself; help the Church become aware of its own shortcomings or mistakes, and help it become a more friendly and beautiful Church. This is the responsibility of every Christian! When our Church makes mistakes, we must remind them and speak up because of love. Running away from solving problems will only expose us to dangerous situations where we may be swallowed up by the prince of the secular world. It will only allow the Church to persist in its complacency, unable to change, to become friendly and beautiful. This is not the result that God and every one of us who loves Him and His Church would like to see. So, my lovely gay brothers and sisters in the Lord, let us shine together for the Gospel and speak for our gay fellows! Let the Church see us, hear us, touch us, know us, respect us! This is the bounden duty of every gay Christian! Lovely limbs of Christ, the Heavenly Father made you, loved you, chose you, and redeemed you. Now it is the time for you to live out your unique values and gifts!

May the Lord be with us and our love forever! Amen!
Love wins! Glory to God!

Youth

Yong Hao, Malaysia

Hello, everyone, my name is Yong Hao. I am 17 years old and 170 cm tall. I was baptised by a priest on the seventh day after I was born. I didn't understand the true meaning of faith as I grew up. It was not until last year that I participated in a healing camp of the Charismatic movement which helped me greatly in believing in the existence of God.

In the camp, a nun shared with us the miracles of the Holy Spirit and other miraculous things. The nun is very famous in Sarawak. Although I found it inconceivable, I also thought it was just some lies for the kids. One night, however, the nun told us we were all palaces of the Holy Spirit and each of us had different graces of the Holy Spirit. At that time, we were all in a room. The nun told us to close our eyes and think about the Holy Spirit and to desire the power of the Holy Spirit. While we were concentrating, the nuns suddenly started saying things we couldn't understand. They spoke aloud and noisily, making strange sounds—they were speaking in tongues. I peeked secretly. I saw that one had fallen on the ground while others were laughing. When it was my turn, I suddenly felt something like the pressure of water. A kind of power came down over me. I couldn't bear it at all. About ten minutes later, when I was able slowly to stand up, my heart was filled with peace. That divine experience has helped me to believe that there is something greater than me. I believe it is the grace of the Lord.

I discovered my homosexual orientation when I was almost fifteen. My family and I had travelled to Bangkok at that time. One night, I walked on a footbridge and saw a pair of LGBTQI+ lovers. The couple were all lovey-dovey. It didn't seem strange to me at all. I just felt very envious and hoped that I could have such a person to spoil me, too. When I was in elementary school, I had had a girlfriend, but we broke

up in the first year of junior high school. After that, I never thought of looking for another girlfriend. But I did not know why I was particularly envious of seeing the affection of this gay couple. At the time, I thought that I might be gay. Later I tried to persuade myself to be attracted to girls, but I just couldn't.

When I returned from Bangkok, I wanted to be with boys, but I did not know that this kind of person was categorised as 'gay'. What made the biggest impression on me was that I had an online relationship with a boy. Although it was an online relationship, it made me very happy. Compared with girls, I felt very happy being around boys that I liked. I had been with the boy for seven months before we broke up. I was very sad. We broke up because I didn't value it. I wanted to know what it would feel like to have two boyfriends. Who could know that this would be the result? I regretted it deeply. A moment of curiosity had hurt the man I loved.

Now my good friends know that I am gay. They have no objection and no contempt. They think that boys and boys coming together is just like boys and girls coming together. There is no difference. I am particularly happy that they do not discriminate against me. In the same way, I do not think that there is any conflict between my faith and my being gay. God loves me and I love God. God also loves 'him', the one God created for me. It is just natural that I love him and he loves me. In the future, I have a lot of things I want to do, such as being a baker, a chef, an actor—and I want a boy to love and pamper me. I used to look for tall boys, but now I feel it is enough if he loves me wholeheartedly, as long as he's not too short!

The rainbow is freedom. It appears all over the world and shows that everyone can have freedom. If Truth is the living principle ("He is not God of the dead but of the living," Mark 12:27), I think the Lord Jesus wants to give our kind of people a test: He wants us to be gay to change people's minds. Gay people are not disgusting. Gay people are also human, they only fall in love with members of the same sex. God wants us to change the minds of all the world, to fight for a non-discriminatory world for gays, and to overcome all sorts of challenges with our bare hands. We must strive for parents to love us even when they know our identity; this is one of the greatest challenges. Although there will always be difficulties, we must be brave. This is our only life and to live out our nature is what God requires of us.

It Does Get Better

Jo, Malaysia

God: Knock, knock
Me: Who's there?
God: God.
Me: God?
God: Yes, I've got good news for you, you're GAY!

Dad was a quiet and discerning man while mum was vocal and very protective over her brood of three children. Since they were both working parents, the only time we had together was during Sundays when we would wake up and go for Sunday mass, followed by Catechism, and then lunch at home before finishing up our revision and homework. I knew my parents wanted the best for us because growing up, our weekends were filled with extra-curricular activities such as sports (I did taekwondo), music (I played the traditional Chinese instrument, erhu, as well as the organ), and then there was church.

When I was a child, we were always asked in school at the start of a new school year, to list down our top three ambitions; what we want to be when we grow up. For about the first couple of years, my top three would be (ranked from the top): a priest, a pilot and a teacher.

Of course, this changed when I was around 10, but not in the way you would think. It happened during one of my catechism classes when our catechist asked if anyone wanted to be a priest and of course, I proudly raised my hand to which she retorted, "But Jonathan, you are aware that priests are not allowed to be married and that they have to take the vow of chastity which means they can't get married so that they can serve God for the rest of their lives?" Never mind that at that age, I had no adult concept of what being in love is about, let alone chastity or

marriage. All I knew at once was that I didn't want to be a priest anymore if I couldn't get married.

***

Fast forward to when I was 15 and knew that I was different from everyone else in school. The boys were dating and the girls were developing breasts and crushes. It was probably the most challenging stage of my life and I can safely say the same for my parents, who had to deal with the strangest outbursts of my pubescent angst. Whilst I was very active in the church, with being an altar boy, an organist in the choir, a committee member of the parish's youth ministry, behind all of this, I was very confused and very misunderstood.

When my parents first found my stash of gay porn stories (Netscape and Yahoo browsers then were loading images at a very leisurely speed so reading was far more exciting and vivid for me), they had a pep-talk with me and not knowing what to say, as typical Asian parents then, just brushed the materials off and hypothesised that this was either caused by peer pressure or that I was just 'going through a phase'.

I continued to rebel but not in the way that Western kids would. My way of rebelling was not to complete my homework, to fail purposely in school, specifically in mathematics. We didn't have any of those 'tiger mum' terms back then, all I remembered was being punished to kneel in front of the altar the day my results were out and told to say the entire five decades of Rosary to pray for guidance from Mother Mary.

The big change came when I was 16 and attended a young journalism programme. Through the one-week programme. I met many youths of my age from various walks of life who seem confident and self-assured. From the many activities about self-expression and creativity, I came to terms with the fact that being 'different', whatever that was, was OK and nothing to be afraid about.

Back home, things began to turn for the better as I was able to speak my mind, have an opinion, hold an argument as an adult and my parents could see that I've changed for the better too and allowed me to do what I wanted to do, be it volunteering with the junior journalists or organising church activities. I also discovered my passion for HIV/AIDS

activism when a few of us young journalists went to a rehab home for former drug users, some of whom were HIV-positive.

> That he may grant you in accord with the riches of his glory to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inner self. (Ephesians 3:16)

My grades in school improved, I was more sociable and no longer the awkward one at social events or in church. I felt closer to God especially at times when I would just pray and hope that he would make things better for me; that it is His will that I should be gay, that he makes my life better.

I graduated from high school and started college and that was when my prayers were answered two-fold.

The first was when I came out to my sister at the age of 18. The second happened when I was 19. My father sat me down one night and asked me if everything was all right. The truth was that it wasn't; one of the guys that I met via an online website was harassing me and I was beginning to feel that it was out of control. Sitting down with them, my dad had the following conversation with me, which I have engraved forever in my mind:

> Dad: Son, are you gay?
> Me: Why? Why does it matter?
> Dad: It matters because I want to know the truth.
> Me: I'm not sure if you want to know the truth.
> Dad: Whatever your reply is, whether you are gay or not, you will always be my son and I will always love you as my son.

I hugged my dad and being completely frank and honest, told him all about myself, about when I knew I was different and how I eventually came to terms with the fact that I was a gay man. He said that I should not forget about my faith and must continue to pray for guidance and that he would also pray for me as my life would be more difficult and more challenging.

By the end of that night, Dad told me that this conversation should stay between us and that it should not be told to Mum and she might not be ready for this life-changing news. That opportunity would come,

10 years later, at the age of 27, when Mum started the conversation after lunch by asking me why she does not see me bring any girls home to introduce to her as my girlfriend. Of course, mothers always know best and I knew then that she had waited long enough to hear the answer coming from my mouth. After coming out to her, she cried and said that I may never be married, or have children, but that she will always want the best for me and wants me to be happy with myself and to always keep God close and near.

> Show me the path I should walk, for I entrust my life to you (Psalm 143:8)

Today, I am a 32-year-old gay professional in the finance industry. I am a member of a prayer group formed seven years ago with a group of friends from the youth ministry. I am a musician with the same parish that I grew up in and a proud godfather to my four-year-old godson. My friends and family have met some of my ex-boyfriends and people whom I've dated before and have welcomed each of them to their hearts and their home.

A cousin of mine once told me that, during confession, he told the priest that he was gay and that he felt it was a sin. The priest then told him that everyone sins, but that since everyone is made in God's image, we should also live by His word, even though it may sometimes be filled with turmoil and pain. The priest concluded the confession by telling him that if he is a Catholic gay man, then he should be the best damn Catholic gay man that God wants him to be.

As a parting word, remember that you are never alone in this journey and like the story of the footsteps in the sand, God is having you on his shoulders when times are tough and when you feel you can't seem to get out of the rut. So live your life, cherish moments spent with your family and love deeply.

Love in Pain

J, Malaysia

My name is J and I have had a special feeling towards the same sex since I was young. When I was in elementary school, I adored the handsome and manly boys. I always felt that they were very charming, and that kind of masculinity gave me a sense of security. I suppressed this feeling for a very long time. When I was in high school, it grew much stronger. It was hard to see my favourite boys getting together with their girlfriends. Every time I blamed myself: why I was like this? Why had I not tried to get rid of my inner desires, and why had I betrayed Jesus? These ideas had been entangled for a long time and I could not get any answers or solutions.

It was only when I was in the university that I had the opportunity to be free from the control of my family. Bit by bit I started to lead a life of unrestraint. I tried to date gay Christians or *gei jau*,[1] but it was hard to find them since the internet was not so developed at that time. After I finished my university studies, I returned to my hometown to look for a job. Meanwhile, I insisted on going to Church to attend Mass regularly.

One day, the priest asked me to be an adviser for the youth league and I agreed. I met a young man during preparation of an activity. He was quiet and had nothing to say. I wanted to cheer him up, so I got close to him. Eventually, I began to take a liking to him because of our constant contact. I often took the opportunity to spend nights in his home. But who would have thought that his younger brother would

[1] In both Cantonese and Mandarin, the pronunciation of the word for gay friend (基友 / *gei jau* / *ji you*) and the first character of the word for Christian (基督徒 / *gei duk tou* / *ji du tu*) is the same. Among gay Christians, *gei jau* or *ji you* means friends both gay as well as Christian.

take a liking to me? I began to struggle: I was his senior and a devoted Catholic, how could it come to this? I felt I was a two-faced person.

Since his younger brother was a very rebellious young man, his parents asked me to talk more with him to offer him guidance. Over an extended period of communication, contact and sharing, the younger brother expressed himself very actively, and I fell in love with him. I was 13 years older than him, and I was constantly reflecting and thinking about what we should do.

Very difficult days followed because he had to go to school while I was working far from the city. We missed each other very much. I often stopped my work, drove to the school and waited for him to date him secretly. We had to find a place without anybody or an unfamiliar place to chat with each other. When I recall those days, I feel the power of love was great. Life went on. We felt very happy but also unhappy because we received no blessings or support from others. We always quarrelled about this point. As he gradually matured and had his own ideas, we had more and more quarrels. Still, when he had school holidays, he would ask his parents if he could go and stay with me. I felt very warm and happy at that time.

This situation continued until he finished his undergraduate studies. During his studies, we went out to have fun. We went to the theatre, to travel, to eat together. The most regrettable thing was that we couldn't take pictures together for fear that our relationship would be discovered. When he received his degree, his mother wanted him to go abroad for further education. He was not willing to go and had severe quarrels, even fights, with his family. Finally, I persuaded him to listen to his parents. It was very, very painful for me, although I pretended to be very supportive of him. I thought that it would be enough as long as he remembered how much I loved him. On the day he boarded the plane, I dared not go to send him off but hid myself away and cried.

We kept in touch when he was abroad, and chatted online to show our care for each other. Sometimes I bought an air ticket to fly there to give him a surprise. We were very happy to see each other once in a while. But after a while, he met a girl and he did not know how to tell me. I could not help feeling angry after I found out. I told him we should not continue our relationship. Since he had his girl, he should stay loyal

to her. But he kept begging, crying and saying that he wanted me. He explained that he just wanted to have a go to know the feeling with a girl. I decided to break up with him because he might not be gay, but had just tried the gay lifestyle because of his young age and curiosity.

After that, I was very depressed and wasn't in the mood to do anything. I had to turn all the pain into my work in the church. The more I learned about spirituality, the more I felt that I was a sinner. I have been sinful and have been punishing myself. Why do I want to sin the children of the Lord? I felt great sorrow and shame when I met other people. I have quietly served the church for redemption. But my inner desire and my love for him have not changed and I think about him all the time. Although he has a girlfriend now, I still love him very much and hope that he is truly happy. I don't want him to feel guilty as well. I will bear this. Sometimes when he has a fight with his girlfriend, I advise him to cherish their relationship. I assure him that everything can be resolved and not to get carried away emotionally. But after I console him, I hide myself away in agony for a few days. So I prayed and prayed that God would end my life as I was suffering so much each day.

However, there is one thing that gives me relief. He once said, "Even if I'm with my girlfriend now, you're still the love of my life and I won't forget you." Those words are what motivate my will to survive. Thanks be to God for giving me a reason and an excuse to go on living.

Walking this World as an LGBTQI+ Person

GM Tan, Malaysia

Nearly 37 years ago, I was born and assigned a female gender identity by my parents and the authorities. My mum told me that, before my legal registration, I showed her who I was with my two dimples and a smile. My dad said that I came out with a head of black hair and the colour of a Peranakan, his ancestral culture. He said that I was definitely from his family by the colour of my skin. My dad likes to joke that I was born a lawyer, but I can't quite believe that it is possible to say this for any baby.

There are a few strong memories here and there of my tender childhood. However, I remember that there were two main role models in my life as a child: my handsome businessman father whom I worshipped and my beautiful mother whom I adored. And then there were my grandparents (parents of my dad) who raised me and my younger sister with lots of water, fried eggs and rice, and television. I did not know about anything else in this world until I saw He-Man on my grandparents' television set.

If you have been reading my previous writings, you will know that I spoke about wanting to be a man on the day I saw He-Man on television. The cartoon and comic characters of King Arthur, Ninja Turtles and any superhero repeated my inclination to identify with my male identity. As I started to grow older and go to school, I started being taught by the adults around me that my feelings, behaviour and 'tomboy' manners were bad for me.

Time after time, I picked up expressions from the adults that essentially I was rough, unladylike, 'like a boy' and not acting as a girl should. No one gave me support, or very little, or told me that I was

beautiful the way I was. If I asked, I received no answers and I started getting confused and often sad. I realise that I slowly built up feelings of rejection and abandonment for being myself with others.

Last year, I found out that at seven years of age I was molested in school by another classmate, but I buried the memory of it after it happened. Learning about it brought me great relief because for nearly 20 years, I could not understand why my scattered memories from when I was seven or eight were so varied. Before my realisation, I could only remember that my school life was rather ordinary when I was seven years old, but that I had a really horrible time in school when I was eight. It finally added a piece to the puzzle of my school life and possibly showed where things went so wrong for me and led me to live a life of being bullied for nine years until I was 17 years old.

These days, when I look back at my school life, I do not feel any sadness or pain about what happened. However, it never leaves me that I was bullied for nine years because I could not fit in at school. I cannot erase my memories. I cannot erase the time that I was given a broken chair to sit on and my whole class laughed at me when I fell over. My yellow skirt flew up, revealing my blue underpants underneath. This was the period when for years male classmates and other young boys would sing the commercial jingle 'Ginvera' (the name of a shampoo) to tease me about my name.

There was also the time when a female classmate hit a netball directly at my face and broke my lips because the impact onto my braces pierced the skin. I remember bleeding and comforting myself while watching the group of netball girls that I played with comfort the girl who hit the netball at me, because she was crying. I also cannot erase the many years of eating lunch alone and dreading every single recess time because I had no one to play with. In fact, I cannot erase the memory that I never had anyone to whom I could go for help with the bullying and my extreme loneliness.

At 10 years of age, I remember coming out to a female classmate in school about liking girls. She avoided me after I told her, telling me that I was weird for liking girls.

Because life was so bad for me, for 10 years I kept my first love a secret from the world as much as possible. My first love was a girl in

church. Every Sunday, I would rush to church to see her and sit with her for the whole church hour. She made me forget, briefly, that life was really bad for me. Although she was two years younger than me, she was very perceptive because of her difficult upbringing: her father left her family when she was very young, so she grew up poor.

At 14, she became a co-breadwinner for her family: her mum, her live-in godmother, her younger brother and herself. When we talked on the phone, she would reveal that she was paid to give tuition and classes to others so that her family could have a better life. However, because she was a beautiful child of mixed origin, she knew that she was called many names behind her back by children of her age. I remember that she worked herself up into being a model when she was 15 to earn an income for her family while being a top student at school and an active ballet dancer.

With everything going on in our separate lives, I believe that my first love and I could never go further beyond friendship because we did not know how to handle social expectations, judgment from the church and our Asian society. We were just two teenagers trying to figure out our complicated lives.

When her mum committed suicide, my first love was about to sit for her SPM. I remember going to church and peering down onto her mum's flattened face in her open coffin. After that, I never saw my first love again.

To overcome my heartbreak, I left Malaysia to read law in the UK and make myself a future with my studies. Because of my trauma and the hard shell I put on in Malaysia, it took me three-and-a-half years to acknowledge publicly that I liked women. After I was laid off in Hong Kong in 2008, I initially did not want to go back and live in Malaysia. That country had broken me inside and out and I feared a certain death if I went home, because of who I am. Twelve years later, here I am.

I returned home to Malaysia, and I am still here, alive. However, I am no longer trying to figure out my complicated life. My inner self has become at ease with who I am and I have learned how to respond to drama and life in a healthier way. Additionally, I find myself using my time to create more health and joy for myself.

During my crawl out of darkness, I realised that I needed to change

my attitude if I wanted to reach happiness for myself. After walking through a history of sexual abuse, bullying, prejudice, discrimination, violence, poverty and self-hate, I started to rewrite my story in 2015.

I prayed that by the end of my path, my LGBTQI+ identity would become part of a path of love. I failed to kill myself twice, so why shouldn't I succeed in living? If not, why can't I try at least to live honestly, without so much fear?

Potentially, there could be a backlash against me. Potentially, there could be legal action against me that might bring me down. Potentially, there might be all kinds of real threats that I cannot control. Potentially, I might lose my job, have no money and no place to go. Potentially, I might end up more alone than I was in school. The fear is very real to me.

I know what it is like to have no money. I also know what it is like to go to someone you admire and ask them for a loan. I also know what it is like to self-sabotage myself constantly. Because of this, even if I am not perfect these days, I know that I breathe and feel better when I believe in myself, come what may.

As an LGBTQI+ person, I believe that I was born to go through a lot of stories, challenges, pain and miracles. I do not know how to accept the idea that I was born and created evil. That I am capable of spreading disease and evil to people by being who I am. Or that I am a creation that goes against God because of who I am.

After what I have seen myself go through, as a woman first, then as a man and an LGBTQI+ person, I know that my life is an extraordinary story of love and success. Whatever tomorrow might be, I will overcome it. My dad's seed and my mum's egg in me are love. When I die, I will die with their essence and I realise that I will live thanks to their seed of love.

Interestingly, I have been called 'privileged' many times by those who do not know my story. I have also been called a threat to national security once for being transgender by people who did not know my story. As an LGBTQI+ person and a lawyer, perhaps, I will be called many names as long as I live by those who do not know my story.

I know that as long as I choose to be proud to be LGBTQI+ in Malaysia, there could be a lot of names and bullying ahead on my path. People might be motivated to stop me so that they can comfortably keep

their prejudices or because they do not know how to deal with people like me. However, I understand that what I will do is continue to be brave and love stubbornly until my time in this world is up.

I believe that being an LGBTQI+ person helped me see colour where others cannot. It helps me appreciate so much in life such as going to the right toilet, seeing your first facial hair, being called 'bro', respecting a woman, because I was denied these privileges before. If anything, I am so grateful to LGBTQI+ for all the lessons it brought to my life.

Personally, being LGBTQI+ does not give me a right to brag or show off. In my view, my path as an LGBTQI+ person is a journey through real life. I find it best lived with freedom and peace. Truthfully, I also believe that LGBTQI+ people help others to learn how to love someone without conditions and live in a world where there is more than black, grey and white. I also believe that LGBTQI+ people helped to bring a lot of light and love to those in need because of their sufferings and stories.

Truthfully, LGBTQI+ people amaze me. They are often extraordinary people in ordinary places, because they are so truthful about how they live their lives. If it were not for so many of them who told their stories and made things better in our world, I would not be here, sharing my own story with you. Because, how could I lie about my truth and colours? Lying about them has become too difficult for me. I am just not ashamed, come what may.

Every day, I pray to God and the universe to use my LGBTQI+ identity to serve and love others as I was intended to do. If anything, I pray every day that I may honour the spirit of unconditional love.

This is my path as an LGBTQI+ person.

From Judge to Soulmate–A Story of Acceptance

Sarah, Australia

It has been a privilege to be invited to share my story with you especially when I know very little about living as a Catholic and a lesbian. I was born in Hong Kong to a traditional Catholic family. I migrated to Melbourne, Australia when I was studying in primary school. I am a cisgender person. I was born a female, identify as a female now and prefer female gender pronouns. Almost all the experiences shared in this reflection took place in Australia. Although this sharing was originally written in Chinese, you will see that my values are sometimes steered by Western, individualistic culture and I barely fit the stereotype of a Hong Kong person.

Your honour

For most of my life, my relationship with God resembled a 'relationship with God the Father only'. The gift of having devout, traditional, and rigid Catholic parents has led me to learn this version of God, where I am constantly separating right from wrong so I will take the most righteous road and be a good daughter.

This has led me to believe that whatever I do incorrectly will let my heavenly Father down, just as I let my earthly father down.

Since primary school, I perceived God as the Judge in a courtroom constantly watching the cross-examination of my sins. Naturally, I was the accused standing in the dock of a court facing an interrogation of all my actions. This biased view of God as the Judge was often challenged during weekly Mass when I heard of the many faces of God, such as God as Jesus the Redeemer; or God as the Holy Spirit the Paraclete,

Divine Counsellor. Listening to other aspects of God did not change my outlook of who He is and His mercy, because the images of God as the rigid Father or the Judge were consistently impressed upon me at home from my immediate family. In my household, faith and religion were chiefly about doing what is right and moral with a strong influence of Confucianism—respect to my elders, obligation to family, service to the community and adhering to the Ten Commandments and God's word. My impression was that God cares only about my moral behaviour.

Loyalty

At the end of secondary education, I began torturing myself with endless self-doubt, believing in the Church's faultlessness in this topic of sexuality. I persuaded myself that with over 2,000 years of wisdom and countless men and women who continued the holy work of the Church and spent their lifetimes studying theology and scripture, how is it possible that I am right and the Church is wrong? Even though I could have walked away and developed my faith elsewhere, I convinced myself that everything taught in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* about homosexuality, such as the clauses from 2357 to 2359 had to be the only proper teaching about this topic. I believed that the teachings could not have been erroneous, which means there must be something corrupted with my desires. I assured myself that if I were to be interested in an intimate relationship with another woman, then it would be a direct step towards sinning. I placed my intentions of wrongdoing into the same category as murder and drunk driving.

On my journey of answer-seeking concerning my sexual orientation, I strove to prove to myself that I was doing the right thing by remaining single. I only read literature that was approved by the Vatican, and particularly books written by the founders and friends of Courage, the Vatican-approved apostolate for ministry for same-sex attracted people. I refused to allow myself to be influenced by the 'evil forces' of non-Vatican approved books—it was the only way I knew to remain loyal to the Catholic Church.

Despite the changing stance in the society, where people have become increasingly tolerant and accepting towards same-sex

relationships, particularly in Australia where I reside, I took very little notice of the society's approval. I cannot recall how many times I have heard a priest during a homily speak about our faith and the Catholic Church acting as a lighthouse in the middle of a storm, where society shoves us along with its changing norms, as a storm at sea that pushes ships onto reefs and shoals. Such winds and waves as described by the priest would be comparable to the society's expectations on sexuality, drug use, money, instant gratification, the value of life and so on, but the lighthouse and the Church does not move. It stands firm and provides guidance to ships away from danger. I put my questions and views about sexuality into the same box with the other values that leads society off course—I believed sincerely that if I were to go along with what society thinks, then society, like the raging seas, would too sink me. I locked myself in the lighthouse so that there would be no chance of me being swept away.

In hindsight, I was brainwashing and protecting myself from any potentially unholy voices. I was not an experimental person and I was afraid to deviate from the Church should I introduce myself to alternative views.

I moved through life a day at a time, keeping these struggles to myself. All my friends were from the same Catholic community, most of whom stood by official Church teaching on homosexuality, just like I was while in public. I have never uttered anything positive about LGBTQI+ rights in front of church members. Some of my friends openly displayed their homophobia during church activities, which crushed my hopes of coming out to them for support or understanding. I began to accept that none of my friends at Church could comprehend what I was going through, and that I would just have to learn to cope with rejection silently.

My loyalty to the Catholic Church meant I never chose to have interactions with other Christians who were also part of the LGBTQI+ community.

Looking now at others who have had similar experiences of suffering and loneliness, I am thankful that I had not self-harmed (I had plenty of ideation but never any plan) such as wrist slitting or misuse of alcohol and drugs to take my mind off the torment and the pain of believing

that God did not ever want me to fall in love with another woman or to be loved.

Home

On my journey so far to this point where I am writing this reflection, personal experience tells me that my immediate family and relatives have never been helpful in the development of a kinder view towards myself, nor an alternate understanding of the Church's stance on sexuality. Their beliefs and homophobic comments have left me feeling disordered, abnormal, and sinful. I have not even come out of the closet yet to any family members, and most of my church friends. I can recall one night, years ago, when I was so stressed following an interrogation from mum when she asked if I was gay, and I experienced sleep paralysis for the first time in my life. It was clearly not a dream to me. I confess that those ten seconds late one night were the most horrifying experience of my lifetime and I even thought that Satan was in my bedroom coming to take me. I prayed the first two lines of 'Hail Mary' in my head (I didn't know how else to send Satan off while I could not move even a finger or open my mouth) before the symptoms of sleep paralysis ceased. It was only during the next morning that I was able to link my experience of sleep paralysis to the extreme fear of being discovered by my parents that I was same-sex attracted.

For a decade I searched for a solution to this moral challenge. I thirsted for approval from the Church to establish a same-sex relationship and be accepted by the Catholic Church simultaneously. However, remaining in a conservative family which upholds a strong stance on keeping 'face' and honoring the family, and as a member of a conservative Catholic community, I heard the same old answer every time I probed—that homosexual acts were sinful and unnatural, wrong, and disordered, regardless of the relationship being monogamous and loving. In hopelessness, I begged God to be a bit more proactive with his interventions so that the Pope would allow for same-sex relationships in the Roman Catholic Church.

Amid all the wrestling in my mind with the Church, my family values, my own desires, what society says, and trying to guess what God

wants, one might call me senseless to have remained in the Catholic Church.

EnCourage and Courage

Amid this ongoing argument with God, which I believed would last for infinity and an argument which I would never have won, I looked for the Melbourne Chapter of Courage. I sought support from people with similar experiences and a community where I could convince myself that I was right to remain single and alone. Courage's missions are aligned with the teachings in the Catechism—that homosexual acts are sinful and their understanding of chastity followed the Church's. I did not encounter any successes with locating a Courage group in Melbourne, but instead found EnCourage, the affiliated group for parents of people experiencing same-sex attraction.

I was welcomed into EnCourage even though my status did not meet their criteria—I did not have a child who was same-sex attracted, but all the members knew I was SSA. The members in EnCourage viewed me as a poster girl, as I was not in pursuit of any intimate relationships. These parents wanted their children to do what I was doing—remain single. The pressure was enormous. On the one hand, I felt I was doing what was right by God and the Church, supporting this righteous cause and bringing hope to these parents who felt their children were lost and doomed. On the other hand, I empathised with their children, as I desired to be in a relationship as they did.

Even though my behaviour was 'good enough' for the members in EnCourage, as I was not involved in any relationships, I felt just as much rejected. Every month during an EnCourage meeting, I listened to how the children of the members were breaking God's heart, people whom I identified with, whose footsteps I could easily follow. I saw my presence as only welcomed and my personhood respected if I met the criterion of singlehood. The truth was that I did not want to be single. The more I associated with EnCourage members and listened to their prayers to save their gay and sinful children from damnation, the more I hid from God and hated myself for wanting a life partner and wanting to sin. I could only imagine how my parents would react if I were to

come out, comparing them to the parents in EnCourage, even if I were to not pursue a relationship. There would be fear, shock, disappointment, self-blame, confusion, and loss of face, and they would try everything to stop me from entering a same-sex relationship and send me to a doctor or psychologist, as they believe that homosexuality is an illness to be fixed up.

By the time that there were three people in EnCourage who were same-sex attracted we felt we could begin a Courage group, I thought that it was the right time to move away from the judgement in EnCourage. The calling to service in me drew me to co-ordinate the Melbourne chapter of Courage while pleasing God as an example to live a moral, partnerless life. My membership in Courage was far more comfortable than in EnCourage, as I no longer had to listen to parents share stories and heartbreak of their "diseased children". My participation in Courage did not particularly bolster my faith, nor weaken my desire for a monogamous same-sex relationship; however, it was one of my first steps to accepting myself for who I am, a normal person, a child of God just like everybody else, and learning to see myself without any assumptions that I sin more easily due to my intrinsic disorder. During my tenure in Courage, for the first time in my life, I was able to forgive myself for being attracted to people of the same sex. I felt liberated as I eventually ceased comparing my longing to be in a relationship to the evildoings of an arsonist or murderer.

Question time

I pulled away from Courage after a year or so of membership. It was not the fellowship and friendship, the chaplain, structure, or low numbers that led to my exit. While doing everything by the book, I recognised eventually that I remained single just so I could please the Lord and the Pope in ways defined by the Church. During this period of discernment, there happened to be multiple reports in the media about the cover-up of institutionalised sexual abuse in the Catholic Church across the world. I did not know anybody personally who had been a victim of sexual abuse in the Church, but such issues constantly reminded me of the humanness of the Church.

Never having questioned the teachings of the Catholic Church, my first query was what if the Church was too fixated on traditional teachings instead of understanding sexuality more fully? And what if I followed my conscience? I examined my behaviours and sources of influence on my views and faith. I could not say that I faced peer pressure, or was exposed to blasphemous, un-Catholic material. I have never had little voices in my head giving me instructions to be attracted to women, nor experienced psychosis as I was, and am, perfectly healthy and never used any substances. I have loving, Catholic parents, who sent me to a conservative Catholic school where I enjoyed studying. I began attending mass every Sunday two weeks since I was born, and I voluntarily lived in a religious bubble, where the claws of society could not touch me and infect me with ideation of same-sex relationships. Everything I read, heard, and watched focused on same-sex attraction was approved by the Vatican. At the age of 27, I arrived at a point where I deduced there was nothing wrong with me in terms of my sexuality. Discernment was no easy feat, knowing that I have a habit of wanting to do what is right, rather than experiment until I find what fits.

Partnership

Sometime after my departure from Courage, I entered a monogamous relationship with another woman who was also a cradle Catholic and actively involved in serving our Church. I was amazed that I felt no sense of guilt or wrongdoing as I had imagined. The scenario of my involvement in a relationship played in my head since my late adolescence, which led to an appreciation of committed relationships which I saw as a gift, because the whole concept of having a relationship was 'off-limits' to me since my early adolescence when I learnt of Church teachings. This gratefulness played a major role in my motivation to love God together with my partner. During my relationship, I encountered difficulties that many closeted couples experienced, such as not being able to come out to our parents, all of whom are conservative Catholics, nor being able to publicly acknowledge our love for each other in Church, or to many of our friends whom were homophobic, particularly those who are Catholic. However, I would not allow these obstacles to stop me from loving my partner.

At the same time, I felt closer to God, forever thanking Him for new experiences and the opportunity to love. Although the relationship has ended at the time of this reflection being written, I did not think for a second that it was a mistake to have arrived at this new chapter of my life.

Concluding thoughts

At the present moment, I am positive this is still not the right time to do a tell-all to my family and church friends. Unfortunately, there is much at risk, such as facing disownment and discrimination. I know that my others' feelings are theirs to manage, but for me, the suppression of my identity in prejudiced environments is the best way forward, especially when I know I have the ability to hide this part of me. What I know I must not do is to hate myself like I used to for being who I am, and blame the Church for stopping me from loving.

I am fascinated by the gradual shift in how I discuss LGBTQI+ subjects now since I began accepting myself, such as not using the words 'condition', 'problem', 'sin', 'intrinsically disordered', 'experiencing same-sex attractions' like there was something wrong with being gay. I am not as afraid of admitting now, that I am a lesbian and I was in a relationship with a woman, to people I feel safe with. All the acronyms of LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, queer) are words I would never have touched even five years ago, when I was a member of Courage. Now it is second nature to me to use them should a related topic arise in conversation. There is nonetheless a long road ahead before I start waving a rainbow flag at a pride march. I am convinced that God allows me to be me. I realised He is not going to deliver me to hell, or some sort of jail sentence for entering a loving and committed relationship with a woman as I had believed for more than a decade.

My view toward the Church, the Pope and most importantly God has also softened since meeting more LGBTQI+-accepting people, some who are straight, some queer. I could not have done this if I had listened to the Vatican's answers exclusively. I am now proudly a part of Acceptance Melbourne, a Catholic ministry for LGBTQI+-identified people in Melbourne, Australia. Once again, I have found brothers and

sisters who have experienced similar struggles as me and have found peace between spirituality and sexuality, and we respect each other for who we are. I am eager to learn the journeys and experiences LGBTQI+ people, particularly Christians, in how they make sense of their faith and sexual identity.

I look forward to having a God-centered life with my future partner and I have confidence that He will bless my next relationship. Lately, I cannot help having an image of God removing his bench wig and robe and inviting me out for coffee so he can listen to me talk about my hopes, dreams, heartbreaks and love, just as any friend would do.

Little Secret

Francis, Australia

There is a little secret, my friend, that we find so hard to believe. You are loved by God. Really. Truly. Exactly as you are. Exactly in this life has God planned for and with you. How am I so sure of this? Let me share my story with you.

I was once told that when my mother was pregnant with me, my parents had been travelling overseas in the United States. At that time, there was a significant anniversary of the life of St Francis of Assisi, and they decided that he would be my patron saint.

I was born in Malaysia, the first-born and only son of a family with four children. My family have Peranakan Baba Nyonya roots (i.e., a cultural mix of Chinese and Malay customs) and the family was educated in what used to be Catholic schools. My family were, and still remain, a prayerful and church-going family. I have memories of my grandparents praying the rosary, saying prayers before meals, attending Eucharistic Adoration, going to Charismatic prayer groups. We attended Sunday school and my family were also involved in parish family prayer groups, called Basic Ecclesial Communities.

I have been involved in church ministry since I was young; the children's choir, the youth choir and then the young adult choir. Likewise, I graduated from being in youth groups, to leading youth groups and then facilitating young adult groups. I also was an altar server. Somewhere in between all this, as a young teenager, my family migrated to Australia. Lots of things seemed different, however, the experience of Church was the same, and somewhat comforting, and familiar, so my church friends very quickly became my close-knit community.

After finishing high school, I studied education and theology at various Catholic institutions. I also felt that I needed to explore religious life or the priesthood, so I started a period of discernment and entered a seminary, however after one year, I knew that God was not calling me to a celibate life of ministry. I still felt, though, a calling to serve in ministry somehow. My intention was to go back to teaching, find a girlfriend, and have kids by the age of 25.

However, God's ways are not always our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9) and God was to have much more in store (1 Corinthians 2:9)

I was thrilled when I got a job working for my bishop, in the diocesan office, helping parishes with their ministries, including religious education and formation. I thought everything was working out well. During World Youth Day in Sydney, a church friend I knew from interstate had flown in to attend with his parish. After the festival was over, he told me he was staying for a few more days and he really wanted to meet up for dinner. We had met a few years earlier at a national gathering of seminarians; we got along very well and we stayed in touch every month or so over the phone or email. He was a few years older and like a mentor to me. We met for dinner and he said that he was re-evaluating being in the seminary and had taken an indefinite break. I walked him back to his hotel after dinner, and we had a few drinks in his room and suddenly, he held me in a very close embrace and tried to kiss me. I excused myself from the situation very quickly and left as I felt really confused, overwhelmed, delighted, scared and shocked at the same time.

For the first time, someone had actually picked up on what I thought were just idle, impossible thoughts in my head; the thoughts that clearly demonstrated I was attracted to men, though I had never acted upon them.

I thought at the time, that this person validated my being gay. It was initially awkward about keeping in contact by phone after that incident, but I began to feel that, again, for the first time, I had someone to talk with about my feelings and experiences of being gay. I, however, began to fall in love with him. Who knows how he actually felt about me, but this secret love for him began to become unhealthy for me. I couldn't talk to anyone else about this, because I felt they did not understand. I thought to myself, how does anyone reconcile sexuality and faith?

I certainly felt that I could not speak with work colleagues; I thought that if anyone ever found out, it would be such a scandal and I could potentially be fired from my job. I certainly knew how homophobic some colleagues and fellow Catholics were. I also knew of support groups for same-sex attracted Catholics; however, some groups believed that being gay was a sin and their support was to basically 'pray away the gay' and help a gay person live a heterosexual lifestyle.

There was a truly supportive, nonjudgemental, gay-affirming group that I had heard of, Acceptance, but I was closeted out of my fear that someone may recognise me if I attended the group. And for my integrity, if anyone was going to fire me, I did not want them to fire me for my sexuality, but for whether or not I did my work well.

So I felt the only person I could speak to was this one guy who I was falling in love with. However, I had to speak to him about what I was going through, and what I was feeling, without letting him see that I was falling in love with him, because he began to make it clear that he was not in love with me.

I felt trapped, I felt like I was always hiding, I felt like life was too difficult, I felt that I would not find anyone who would understand me, I felt that I would lose my job if anyone found out, I felt that I would bring shame on my family, I felt that my church friends would leave me, I felt that I was not attractive because I was Asian in a predominantly Anglo gay community... I felt lots of things. I felt that I would never find someone to love me.

I thought about suicide twice. The first time was just a fleeting moment and in my fear, I hid it very quickly, hoping it would not surface. The second time, I was actually staying at the apartment building of the guy I was in love with. I had confronted him about whether anything was actually going to develop further between us. No, was his reply, but did I want to sleep on his bed while he slept on the couch? I was heartbroken and stayed the night awake on his couch. I walked to the balcony, about 20 floors up, and looked over the edge, just wondering, what if…

I do not know if I have ever been so scared as at that moment. I stepped very slowly back from the balcony and I spent the night crying and praying and cursing and silently screaming at God. I wasn't sure

whether I wanted to die, or to be saved, or to be furious, or to be scared. I cried out to God and asked what was the use if no one loved me. I don't hear voices, but somehow I felt that God was trying to tell me: "You know that I love you." I was so furiously sad: "I know you love me. But you don't count! You made me. You are God. You are *supposed* to love me! You don't have eyes to look at me. You don't have a mouth to speak words to me. You don't have lips to kiss me. You don't have hands to hug me!"

I finally fell asleep, out of exhaustion, for a few hours before it was morning and time to go to Church. The guy took me with him to Church, and I was miserable and exhausted. He was kneeling beside me at the pew saying his prayers before Mass started. The bells started to ring, I could smell incense and just then a ray of light streamed through the stained glass window illuminating his figure. It was just too much for me, and I left the church holding back tears. I fumbled my way into a corner of the gardens surrounding the church and I crawled up into a foetal position and sobbed.

Now, I'm really sceptical when I hear about supernatural things. I don't know how long I was there, or how to describe what happened, other than to say that in that moment of despair, I felt like God gave me a hug as if to say "I know I don't have hands to hug you, but here is a hug anyway. And even if you can't understand my love for you, I do love you."

In a very simple yet deeply profound way, I felt like I had experienced the meaning of a baptism; to experience death and resurrection; to be in God's complete love. And to know that there was nothing wrong with me. Nothing to be ashamed about. But that I was truly loved exactly as I was.

A long story cut short, I went back to university to study psychotherapy. I quit my job. I came out to my family and friends gradually who were mostly supportive, even if they didn't understand. I joined an amazingly supportive group of LGBTQI+ Catholics (called Acceptance). I have made these life-long friends from Acceptance, and through friends at Acceptance, I have been encouraged to write this story for this book.

Yes, not everything is perfect; one of my brothers-in-law is very homophobic because of his upbringing in a family who belong to an

ultra-fundamentalist group who call themselves the only true Catholics. I have received homophobic rejection from some work colleagues and ex-friends. I was once invited by the Broken Bay Diocese Catholic Schools Office to speak to Catholic school students on the topic of Pope Francis' statement "Who am I to judge a gay person of goodwill who seeks the Lord?" only to be told that someone had reported that I supported marriage equality on my personal Facebook and therefore I was now judged unsuitable to be a guest speaker and my invitation was now rejected. Isn't it ironic? What a dysfunctional Church we are!

And speaking beyond Church issues, yes there are good people and not-so-good people in the rainbow community too; yes I've experienced sexual racism (i.e., feeling judged by people in the gay community because I am Asian). Yes I've also experienced heartbreak from previous boyfriends. I know realistically though, everyone experiences these painful things from relationships (and hopefully learns from them).

Back to the good things. I belong to a gay-friendly Catholic parish church community. I work in pastoral counselling at a Catholic Hospital amongst gay-friendly colleagues. I met my wonderful partner at a meditation group, and he has the most beautiful heart, he loves me, and I love him, and my family accept him, and us. I volunteer with various LGBTQI+ groups in a counselling support role, and even LGBTQI+ multi-faith and multicultural groups. And I continue to have good friends inside and outside the rainbow community and my life is full of many blessings.

Remember how I said at the start that God loves you? I hope that the sharing of our stories in this book demonstrates that God does love us; gay, LGBTQI+, straight, Asian, whatever your ethnicity and background, Catholic, Christian, whatever religious background or spiritual path you lead now… we are loved; you and I, not despite who we are, but exactly as God made us. And absolutely everyone is welcome to God's love. And our life stories are a witness to love. And now my friend, I wonder, what about the love that you find in your own story?

Tea for Togetherness[1]

Benjamin Oh, Australia

When my younger brother broke the news that he was going to be married to his fiancée, an intelligent, capable and wonderful woman who is very much his other half, I felt so much joy for the celebration that was to come. But a part of me also began to become quite anxious, not just because it was only less than six months to their wedding date, but... weddings in my family are huge events—and I was concerned about whether our familial kinship system and greater community could handle *my* reality. This story, our stories, our lived experience, tells not just about kinship and relationship, but also about the intersectionality of our faith, culture, law and lore, and the outcomes they generate.

Anxiety

A large part of my mounting anxiety was due to the fact that my entire extended family clan would be converging for the first time, in a long time, for my younger brother's wedding. Increasing my anxiety was that this would be the first major family event since I had made my sexual orientation a non-secret (there was no 'coming-out', I did no public declaration, just an ordinary acknowledging and identifying myself as 'gay' and a homosexual). I was also of course worried if Nam, my spouse, would be invited, and where he would be placed, or if he would be acknowledged to be the spouse that he has been for me over so many years (these are important indicators of whether our familial kinship system had evolved to include my reality and the both of ours. Our families are important to us, I am after all from a typical Malaysian-

[1] Dedicated to my brother Bryan and sister-in-law Sue May, and all the family, friends and allies, who stood with us when no one dared to.

Chinese-Catholic family, if there is such a thing).

Bigotry

I remember past incidents where extended-family members would speak of homosexuals and transgender people in derogatory terms. I experienced being harangued by one of them about how my life and lived experience as a homosexual was unworthy, 'unnatural' and wicked. Blinded by their own ideological lens, they wouldn't even relate to me on a human-to-human basis as a family member. Words such as 'an abomination', 'intrinsically evil', 'objectively disordered' were used to vilify me as quoted from documents and literature produced by anti-gay church groups. Even though I was familiar with that kind of 'language', it still shocked and hurt me as it came from family members whom I grew up knowing.

I felt lucky that at that time I was already in a much more secure place in my life where I had a deeper sense of who I am and had found a deeper understanding of a few more things—I imagine if it was myself at an earlier more vulnerable stage of my life, it would have been quite devastating, especially when it comes from members of your own family, even extended ones.

Lateral violence

My parents told me a story of their own experience involving an extended-family member nudging them to 'pray away' my being gay. The person made them feel like they had done something wrong, or I was somewhat 'disordered' or 'deviant'; some even recommended that my parents should in fact distance themselves, not to appear to be supporting my 'lifestyle' and to stand up in opposition as a form of punitive measure. What they were effectively doing, consciously or unconsciously, was trying to separate the love between my parents and I. My parents kept this story from me for a while, I imagine because they knew how much that would have hurt me. I learnt how my parents were deeply hurt by those expressions, but their love for me was unwavering.

Family

My parents and I never stopped journeying together in humility and love. Since coming out to them as being gay, we spent more quality time together than we ever had, we let down our guard, our fear and the shame that others had put onto us. We cried a lot together, but those healing tears helped us arrive at a deeper sense of our humanity, even with the injury 'scars' that reminded us of how close others came to dividing our family. For this I am grateful—but for that reason, I resolved to join my other rainbow siblings in making a change to right such wrongs and injustices. Many of us who are LGBTQI+ know all too many sad stories with tragic consequences of broken faiths, broken families and broken lives around our communities, infested by the ignorance, the irrationality and dehumanising effects caused by homophobia and transphobia.

Weddings are so often structured in hyper heteronormative-centric, childless-shaming, single-bashing festivals where the 'rest of us' and our realities are often ignored and denied in many of these community occasions, deliberately or subconsciously. These heteronormative narratives make invisible our relationships, our experiences and our shared hopes, aspirations and lives. And to feel judged, excluded or marginalised at these events by unkind family and community members, does make attending weddings difficult.

Serendipity

But, one fateful evening, my younger brother rang me to make sure that my partner and I were 'returning home' from Australia to be with them in the lead up to the wedding and requested us to play different roles for the event. It was a lovely phone call. My younger brother asked me to help compose the Nuptial Mass liturgy for their wedding, for he is just as sensitive to exclusionary language and theology used by some in our church as I am. That was probably why he asked me to help compose a welcoming and inclusive liturgy that did not hurt or exclude people. Like most people, we have divorcees amongst our friends and loved ones, LGBTQI+ people amongst his good friends and others that our church often harms and exclude in words and in their condemnatory postures.

But to my surprise, he then also asked Nam to be his best man. Honestly, I was quite chuffed and proud that he and his fiancée did that. Nam was humbled and I was quite moved by that gesture; Nam of course said yes. Perhaps it was a way of my younger brother making sure that neither our elder brother nor I got any 'favouritism', and that we were 'equally' and conveniently left out, a clever diplomatic move of the first order.

Allies

My younger brother is one of my biggest pillars of strength. Though he is different to me, he has become one of my greatest supporters and best friends. We share many common values about faith, culture and social justice, amongst them the equal rights and dignity of LGBTQI+ folk. My younger brother witnessed a lot of my life as we were growing up together. When I came out to him, his reactions were that of curiosity as to why I am not attracted to the girlfriends around us, some who were particularly close to me and some who were particularly attractive. He saw my silent pain and suffering of others' ignorance and unkindness, and witnessed how people could love you one moment and then turn their backs on you because of homophobia. As part of a Malaysian Chinese family, I was also constantly taunted for not having a girlfriend, especially at weddings and community events in the wider cultural community. He would often defend me by explaining to non-Catholics that I was planning to be a Catholic priest and they are celibate, which was a vocation I was genuinely considering at that time.

Christianity

Love, is love experienced. Love is not a technical question or a theoretical argument as the ideological warriors like to argue, objectify and reduce the lived experiences of LGBTQI+ persons into a theory. We are not an idea or an issue for an interesting debate. We are persons, in the Christian tradition—we are made in the image of God, unique and sacred, each of us an expression of God's love and mystery. Our religious and cultural traditions as it is with our laws are imbued with the best and worst of our humanity throughout human history.

There is a particular kind of cruelty that is inflicted on LGBTQI+

Malaysian Chinese Catholics. Your culture, your nationality and your religion collude to actively exclude you from the fuller experience of being a whole person. As a homosexual or transgender person, you are treated as a deviant by the law, regardless of your contribution to the general community. The Malaysian Chinese culture is often infused with the regressive strain of Confucianism which requires you to produce an heir for your family, and to not do so would be unfilial. Your religion objectifies your sexual orientation or gender identity which is innately apart of you, as a 'problem' or an 'issue' that needs to be 'rectified' or to be 'exorcised'. It is a killer combination, literally, that leaves you no room to be just as you are. Is it a wonder why LGBTQI+ people account for such high rates of depression or suicide?

Many cultural practices and religious beliefs that were once acceptable are completely in contradiction with our contemporary and scientific understanding of the world today: Foot-binding, slavery, honour-killing, etc., just to name a few. Even the church's understanding of humanity, of our very existential place in the cosmos has changed over the centuries. Previously, our cultures and our religions supported by lore and laws once thought slavery was an acceptable practice, that women were property and subordinated to men, and that entire cultures and religions were viewed as subhuman and even evil in comparison to 'ours'.

In Havana, Pope Francis reminded Catholic Christians that "service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people." This puts both our Chinese culture and our Catholic Christian faith into perspective. That "People of flesh and blood, people with individual lives and stories, and with all their frailty: these are those whom Jesus asks us to protect, to care for, to serve."[2] For me, this goes to the very heart of Christian praxis as exemplified in the Beatitudes.

Home

Going back to the story of my younger brother's wedding—six months after that phone call, we landed 'home'. Before long, we found ourselves

[2] Ann Schneible, 'Pope in Cuba: Christians serve people, not ideology', *Catholic News Agency*, September 20, 2015. http://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/pope-christians-serve-people-not-ideals-87869/

wedding organisers and I, with the extra role of a chauffeur (apparently I am the 'stable, slow, safe, steady driver', in other words—a boring driver). Nam proudly took his role as the best man and stood at the church altar with my younger brother. It all went well for the church ceremony; the family is large and capable enough to form our own choir, and we are a family of choristers. What made it all the more special, was that Nam's family were also invited, honoured and present.

The Wedding

After the church ceremony, came the nuptial tea ceremony. This is a solemn ceremony in both Nam and my cultures. The ceremony solemnises the kinship lineage now joined together by the newlywed couple. At the ceremony, the newlyweds greet all the living elders of the family one by one. By offering the elders sweet tea (sometimes wine) and the elders' acceptance of the cup, the elders signify the solemn acceptance of the new members as part of the family lineage. Customarily, the elder siblings and their spouses are included; this was a moment about which I felt quite pensive.

Before arriving in Malaysia, Nam and I had a long conversation between ourselves and prepared ourselves mentally in the scenario that Nam was not called up for the Nuptial Tea Ceremony. In fact, we had deliberately excused ourselves from the planning of this part of wedding schedule to not cause any more distress to my younger brother and his spouse, as there was a possibility that Nam would be completely left out by the elders who are often the authorities for the protocol of invitation to the tea-ceremony.

Acceptance

One by one, the elders went up by our family peerage. Then came my turn. First I heard them call just my name. In what felt like an hour (even though it was less than three seconds), Nam's name was also called together with mine. There was a strange tension in the air as Nam and I made our way to take our place in front of the entire gathering of family members and close friends. Then, my younger brother and his bride in the traditional manner, asked Nam and I individually (amplified by the

sound system): "Dear elder brother Ben, please have tea", "Dear elder brother Nam, please have tea"—at that moment, it felt so surreal. With Nam sitting next to me, I felt as if I was witnessing the ceremony out of my body. In that strange and gentlest of ways, a new lore and law was born, a new tradition was charted for our family.

What seemed to be a fairly insignificant ritual in the scheme of things, was in fact a huge leap for our culture. We are still evolving our rituals and language to accommodate this new emerging reality of openly same-gendered spousal relationships. As it stands, it was the first formal endorsement of our relationship status, of Nam's place in the family lineage. In that ritual, it accorded Nam full membership to the family and gave us recognition as a spousal couple within my family. In short, Nam is now a brother to my siblings, my spouse as well as a son to my parents.

Faith

My younger brother and sister-in-law's insistence in having us included in his nuptial tea ceremony gave dignity to our LGBTQI+ humanity and our relationship, restoring faith in an otherwise outdated, exclusionary, patriarchal culture. It is through our relationships, friendships, family, our straight allies and the kind gentleness that we bring to our surrounding environment, that we will able to bring meaningful and tangible change. Through these small gestures by our straight allies, our heroes, we can imagine the possibility of a place where we can all be, and will be, welcomed.

Later that evening at an 800-strong wedding reception banquet, I was also asked to deliver the grace blessing to start off the evening's grand celebration. I felt a sense of quiet joy and gratitude… that change is possible, that yes, love does overcome fear and ignorance.

The Word Was the True Light That Enlightens All Men; And He Was Coming Into the World[1]

Félix Chen, Canada

Jesus loves you! This is a phrase often heard in church, from the loudspeakers of roadside preachers, in the propaganda of pamphlets, at 'pro-life' rallies. It should be a hopeful proclamation, but has become more and more negative and unpleasant. That's why we often hear this phrase "I'm good, thank you." *Jesus loves you!* Yes, that's right. But with one condition: if you are not gay, lesbian, trans, etc. This is a position that comes from the Church and *sola scriptura*.

I would like to share some of my experiences.

The first time I was attracted to a boy was when I was 14. It was the same year that I came out to my parents and get in touch with Christianity (*eu des connaissances du christianisme*).

The 'horrible verses' in the Bible did not scare me, because there are other unreasonable laws in the Old Testament: certain animals are forbidden to be eaten, certain sins lead to the death penalty, etc. At the time, I was more focused on the issue of eating blood.

The reason I started to worry about the homosexual problem was not because what the Bible said, but because of the position of the Church, which put me under a lot of pressure. In the world of Chinese Christianity, there is a well-known Protestant pastor, Rev Stephen Tong (Tang Chongrong), who is strictly against the LGBTQI+ community. I've seen quite a few of his sermon videos. His influence in the Church made

[1] The Gospel of St John 1:9.

me aware that this is not a normal topic that I could just ignore. 'Taboo', a term from religious anthropology, made an appearance.

At the time, for me, this taboo did not differ much from that of ancient religions: both were based on beliefs without reason.

Thus, I consider this homosexual taboo in Christianity a subject that absolutely must be reformed. Of course, the thoughts of that time are not as clear as those of today. However, I am sure that the spirit of resistance to the unjust is already in my heart. For it is a question of who I am, of my existence.

So far, my encounters with Christianity are still at the level of reason. The trip to France, at the age of 15, became an inexhaustible internal force. It was a Sunday in Paris, I wanted to spend two hours at Notre-Dame. Coincidentally, it was Mass time. At the time, I had no idea about Catholicism. For in all my knowledge received from the propaganda of Chinese Protestantism, the notion of denomination was rarely presented. So, *a fortiori*, I did not understand anything about the Catholic Mass. Because of this ignorance, I will realise in the future what a great grace I received from the Lord.

When I was visiting the magnificent cathedral, bathing in the beauty of the architecture, statues, paintings, and rosettes, suddenly music began. With the music and the voice of men, a 'master' (priest) entered, in solemn dress. What was happening at that moment no longer existed, what remained was a foreign music striking directly at the depths of my heart. In a short moment, I was bathed in a great and divine force. It was like the first time I was thrown into a pool. This sovereign force was a pool that fell from the sky, one that bathed and enveloped my soul, my mind, my thoughts, my whole existence. It is not oppression, nor fear, nor suffocation, but a great force, which manifests itself towards me. When I saw the ray of this force, I had no other choice. All I could do was to bow down, to praise, to bless. Full of warmth and peace. Like the Ecstasy of St Teresa, with a face of 'pain', it is an extreme exultation, but one that is in peace and full of peace. Instead of the pride that points inward, it is an exultation outward, toward God, toward a higher existence than us. It is an exaltation when we enjoy the greatness of nature, of creation, of the hand of God. The first time we see Mount Everest, the first time we see the waves breaking, the first time we see

the clouds around us.

Nature is a refraction ray of God's glory. But any grandeur of nature is null and void, if we compare it with liturgical music which concentrates devotion, zeal, and religious ardour (*la dévotion*, *le zèle et l'ardeur religieuses*). The simple voice of men is like the doorway of Paradise, from which I glimpsed the figure of the invisible God seen from behind. Like the experience of Moses in "the flame of a burning bush," he "covered his face, afraid to look at God" (Exodus 3:2-6). I cried, unceasingly. The tears that blurred my vision and cleansed my face became my veil before this same God. It is an incomparable, unforgettable, indelible, immutable memory.

This moment is consecrated in eternity. Whenever and wherever I am, every time I recall the grace coming from God, I can always refer to that summer in Paris. This memory can always deliver me from all shame, regret, remorse, and isolation. This memory has been sanctified and consecrated, once and for all, as the sanctuary in my own heart. It is full of imperishable glory, it has become my inexhaustible source of energy (*Là où est plein de gloire impérissable, là où est devenu ma source d'énergie inépuisable*). Each time I bathe deeply in this memory (as I am doing here, writing this), makes me recall the most Holy Mass, the 'terrible moment' when the priest raises the chalice and the paten, to renew the alive and holy sacrifice, which never ceases to nourish us, to give us strength, to remind us of the unchangeable promise of God.

This experience touched me deeply. My ignorance shows the grace and generosity of God. Each time I unite with this experience, I often explore new values and thoughts. This source of strength encourages me to continue the path of 'synodality', discerning the calling of beauty, in order to follow the trace of God's presence.

After high school, I came to Canada for my studies. The first station was Montréal, a very lovely (*aimable*) French-speaking city, full of grace and the trace of God, which is also considered my second home (*ma deuxième patrie*). Despite the movement of secularisation, the Catholic Church retains a close relationship with the people of Québec. The French language, the Catholic Church, and Québec nationality form a mysterious 'trinity', which gradually attracted me.

When the French settlers arrived in this new land, they brought with

them language, religion, and nationality. They were symbiotic from the start, with the distinctive imprint of a feudal dynasty and an impressive persistence. For a long time, there was not too much difference between Francophones and Catholics; they seemed to be a person's innate identity. The symbiosis of language and nationality in turn strengthened the bond with the Church. Like the triple vow of Harry Potter's Fidelius Charm, language, religion and nationality unite Québécois to this land, deeply. When we talk about Québec, what are we talking about? Language protectionism, nationalism, a wave of secularisation? No, secularisation is precisely the powerful proof of the existence of the Church that cannot be ignored. The Archbishop of Montréal is still active, and the Archbishop of Québec still firmly carries the cardinal's scarlet biretta.

Because of the Francophone identity I share with Québécois, we are part of the same 'person'. *In persona Québécois!* Especially after my transfer, facing an almost purely English-speaking environment and looking across the river to Québec, it was like looking away from my homeland. I left China, but with an added sense of nostalgia. The first is due to physical blood, the second to the spiritual ties that bind me so deeply. From Paris to Montréal, the new identity that comes from the Catholic faith and the French language is becoming more and more integrated with 'who I am'.

Who am I? I am of Chinese origin, a member of the LGBTQI+ community, a newborn Francophone who is attracted to the mysterious trinity: the French language, the Catholic religion, the national identity. I am, so to speak, a Chinese Québécois who celebrates Saint-Jean-Baptiste Day.

The pride that my Francophone identity offered, has awakened, and encouraged my LGBTQI+ pride. Under the marginalisation, encirclement, oppression, and cultural colonisation of the English-speaking supremacy, the people of Québec resist without compromise. The pride of being the only cultural oasis in North America echoes the pride of my LGBTQI+ identity and the light conceived in Notre-Dame de Paris. It was this light from the Holy Spirit that consecrated me.

The inner energy was awakened, and Pope Francis' outer words of tolerance gave me hope to "lift my heart to the Lord" (Eucharistic Prayer), to the heavens. The future of the Church is not to walk back through the conservative door, nor to take the attitude of self-

imprisonment of pre-Vatican II, but to "open the windows and let the wind of the Holy Spirit blow" (Pope Paul VI). Just like what we sing on Pentecost Sunday, in the French Mass, "*Ô Seigneur, envoie ton Esprit, qui renouvelle la face de la terre!*" (O Lord, send your Spirit, who renews the face of the earth!).

O Lord, you sent Pope Francis to bring fresh air to the Church and hope to countless people on the margins of society. We, tens of millions of people, were once unappreciated, ostracised and suppressed. But we firmly believe that Jesus is "a friend of tax collectors and sinners" (Matthew 11:19). He has not left us, "for where two or three meet in my name, I shall be there with them" (Matthew 18:20). Lord, you never abandon any of your children, for they are the brothers and sisters of your own beloved Son, Jesus.

O Lord, we are all the face of the Christ, "the image of God" (Genesis 1:27), black, yellow, and white, but why not rainbow colours? The colours of the rainbow, a sign of your covenant with us, shine proudly in the sky, also in the most holy Sacred Heart of Christ the Good Shepherd, in the Immaculate Heart of Mary, who preserved all mankind, and in the most chaste Heart of St Joseph, cornerstone of families (Litany of St Joseph, translation of USCCB, 2022) (*Soutien des familles*). Uniting in this 'earthly trinity' with faith and hope, we pray to the Heavenly Holy Trinity to graciously hear us.

O Lord, as the Church says, your love is unconditional, instead of adding small words in the corners of the 'Gospel advertising'.

After civil marriage with my same-sex partner in Canada, I experienced God's love more deeply. God's compassionate and inclusive heart was clearly shown to me through my partner's face. It was also in this loving relationship that I learned to better understand the meaning of communion.

I gave my partner a parable during our first year: our love is a drop of water that melts into rivers and seas, that can no longer be separated from it. Just like what Genesis says, "a man leaves his father and mother…and they become one body" (*l'homme quittera son père et sa mère…et tous deux ne font plus qu'un*) (Genesis 2:24), for "this at last is bone of my bones, and flesh from my flesh!" (*voilà l'os de mes os et la chair de ma chair*) (Genesis 2:23).

Each human being must step out of himself, embrace others, and engage in a relationship of mutual trust, in order to reach a higher level of perfection. It is in encounters with others that we come to know the reality of ourselves. For me, marriage is a solid assurance that keeps us deeply committed and makes the two of us 'one body' (*qui fait en sorte que « tous deux ne fassent plus qu'un »*).

In my encounter with him, I glimpse the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Jesus also lived in a human family, where he was born, grew up and experienced the sorrows and joys of human life. Jesus, in turn, witnessed the love of Mary and St Joseph, and in this 'earthly trinity' he found coherence with the Communion within the Heavenly Holy Trinity.

I would like to conclude with the prologue of the Gospel of St John.

> 12 But to all who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to all who believe in the name of him.
> 13 who was born not out of human stock or urge of the flesh or will of man but of God himself.
> 14 The Word was made flesh, he lived among us, and we saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth.
> (John 1:12-14)

> *12 Mais à tous ceux qui l'ont reçu, il a donné de pouvoir devenir enfants de Dieu, eux qui croient en son nom.*
> *13 Ils ne sont pas nés du sang, ni d'une volonté charnelle, ni d'une volonté d'homme : ils sont nés de Dieu.*
> *14 Et le Verbe s'est fait chair, il a habité parmi nous, et nous avons vu sa gloire, la gloire qu'il tient de son Père comme Fils unique, plein de grâce et de vérité.*
> *(Jean 1:12-14)*

We are all children of God, may we unite in the true Light that shines on every man, that we may bear witness to Him who is "full of grace and truth."

Nous sommes tous enfants de Dieu, que nous puissions nous unir dans la vraie Lumière qui brille sur tout homme, afin de témoigner Celui qui est « plein de grâce et de vérité ».

II. REFLECTIONS

Gay Catholics in Mainland China

The experience of Eros Shaw and others

This introductory article has been intended since we began planning for this book. This chronology of events leading to this publication is considered necessary to remind us of the journey we have taken—in the words of Deng Xiaoping, "crossing a river by groping at the stones." It is based on my participation in establishing the China Rainbow Witness Fellowship (CRWF) and the China Catholic Rainbow Community (CCRC), respectively, an ecumenical body with Catholics participating and a platform only for Catholics. I felt it was important to sketch my experience for readers who desire a glimpse of this journey.

The journey began in 2009. There had been sporadic contact with other gay Catholics on the internet. But there was no frequent contact among us and none would even think of setting up an organisation. This was due to fear and differences in location. I moved to work in Beijing in 2009 and there I attended a sharing session by Rev Ngeo Boon Lin[1] in the Beijing LGBT Center. After the session, a dozen or so gay Christians from various denominations gathered in a bar in the famous Sanlitun district. Those present proposed regular meet-ups to become companions. I was the only Catholic that day and remained so for a certain period of time.

[1] Rev Ngeo Boon Lin is an ordained minister under the Metropolitan Community Church (MCC) in the US. He has great influence among Chinese LGBTQI+ Christians. Present at the sharing session by Rev Ngeo was another MCC pastor. When I asked a question related to Catholicism, Rev Ngeo introduced the pastor to me, stressing that he was raised Catholic and is now ordained in the MCC. Despite the difficulties, My GNRC colleagues and I remain part of the Catholic Church and continue to work. Although I am actively involved in the ecumenical movement, I still insist on studying theology and spirituality at various Catholic universities.

Since the first gathering, we desired and treasured the ecumenical spirit, and together we shared our faith and life. Every morning I started my day by sending the other members of our group the daily Scriptural reading. We sometimes organised recreational activities before one of us could make his home our gathering point. In our regular meet-ups, we took turns sharing our stories. With someone leaving the group and newcomers joining, there was a time when we had three Catholics showing up in those gatherings. We decided to name our group the China Rainbow Witness Fellowship,[2] as in Genesis, the bow was the sign of God's covenant with men, and the rainbow is also one of the signs of gay pride. We in the group longed to be a witness of ecumenism and grace, and therefore adopted this name. When we later started our chapters in Shanghai and Hangzhou, we used the same name.

I returned to work in Shanghai in September 2012. Darren, who co-founded the fellowship, drove me through the streets to look for a suitable place for our gatherings. We picked the UCB Café at Guilin Road and began our Rainbow Witness Fellowship in Shanghai.

We gathered every Sunday regularly, and what we shared ranged from the Bible, theology, ecumenism, Church history to psychological development and AIDS prevention. With more people joining and many of them willing to commit themselves to the fellowship, little by little I passed my duties on to them.

During this period there were more gay Catholics coming. There were also some positive outcomes from our evangelisation. but I will not elaborate at this time on these stories. In July 2013, Brother Xiao Bei, a

[2] The experiences of founding the China Rainbow Witness Fellowship and the China Catholic Rainbow Community are inseparable. Many would like to know the history of Rainbow Witness Fellowship and I think it is necessary to recall briefly here. Darren, Xiao Mi and I were the founders and core members. I was at the beginning responsible for coordinating the group in Beijing. Xiao Mi took up my duty when I had to leave Beijing. In 2012, Darren and I started the Shanghai Rainbow Witness Fellowship. Darren also gave his support to the founding of the Hangzhou Rainbow Witness Fellowship by our companion, nicknamed Shuizhixing (since then, Fellowships started in Wuhan and Changsha). Meanwhile, Brother Xiao Bei had already started his ministry of gathering gay Catholics. Based on my experience of running the Fellowship, I therefore joined Brother Xiao Bei to found the Catholic Rainbow Community.

seminarian, established a QQ chat group to gather gay Catholics and accompany them. Later we adopted Catholic Rainbow Community[3] as the name of our group.

When I realised that some of my Catholic fellows stopped coming regularly because they could not adjust to the Protestant way of worship adopted by the group as the usual format for the gatherings, I wrote a *Proposal for Catholic Gathering Under the Structure of Fellowship* for my fellow staff members in the Fellowship. Below I quote a few passages:

> You may come to understand and agree that the Fellowship has been a platform open for possibilities, and for every activity we organise we need a leader that fits for it. If that is the will of God, our persistence will promise us a fruitful result. We would not have expected that the gathering in the bar at Sanlitun in 2009 would turn into the Fellowship we have today. Gatherings for lesbians, bisexual and transgendered persons are all we can imagine and understand. Are LGBTQI+ fellowships in Hong Kong, Taiwan and other countries going the same way to show their love and compassion? Would the Rainbow Witness Fellowship do the same by running the first ever Catholic gathering in mainland China as one of the many other fellowships for homosexuals?
>
> If this is truly the will of God, the gathering would become a small channel for ecumenical dialogue. This would allow gay Protestants and their Catholic counterparts to understand each other deeply. Call to mind the two pilgrimages we made to Sheshan, this work (of promoting dialogue) had already started indeed. It is now the time to make it clearer that gatherings for Catholics are introduced under the current structure of the fellowship.
>
> I even have a vision that Catholic gatherings will take place in all the Christian fellowships in the future. God will make ecumenism more feasible in the marginalised group for homosexuals than in other groups.

The proposal gained support from my collaborators. The Fellowship decided to have a Protestant way of worship for the first three Sundays

[3] There are plenty of platforms on the internet for gay Christians, such as Weibo, Weixin, QQ group and other websites, but they are mostly for Protestants, while ours is one of the few that serves gay Catholics. There is another QQ group where gay Catholics join together to pray the Rosary. There may be other groups in those platforms but I have not participated in them.

each month while the last Sunday we have the Catholic way of gathering (in the Beijing chapter, we stuck to this practice for almost half the year). On the last Sunday of June 2014, I invited some gay friends who share both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds to share the grace of ecumenism. We spent the fourth Sunday for the rest of the year explaining the Catholic understanding of the Creed.

Hailing Pope Francis' election and his compassion towards gay Catholics, our enthusiasm to evangelise has greatly been encouraged. We have to date more than a dozen of us baptised as Catholics and the number continues to increase, plus those who converted from Protestantism to Catholicism. To respond to the Pope's call for pastoral charity, a priest allowed us to use a room in his parish. We became the first group in China to have our regular meetings in a church. We reached a record high of having almost a hundred of us attending the same gathering. Not only did we spread the faith of the Catholic Church on the occasion, we also showed the mercy of the Church. In northern China, there was another compassionate religious sister who lent her place for gay Catholics to gather. These merciful priests and sisters are true pastors!

Unfortunately, this good situation did not last long. A non-Christian joined us at a Christmas celebration in Shanghai. He uploaded photos to his Weibo account. The photos were then copied and circulated widely by a critical group from the church. They ridiculed and attacked us in a very extreme manner (in particular, the group also used very negative language to criticise their priests and bishops, and even speak against Pope Francis and others from abroad. When you have a look at their Weibo accounts, you may find that all the posts are of the same kind. Please pray for them). Feeling sorry to the priest for his kindness and hoping to stop the dispute, we left the parish. The first large-scale reception of gay Christians by the Catholic Church in China had come to an end after barely four months. Reviewing and learning from this experience, Church people from different sectors and I, myself, have much to reflect on and think about.

The continuous existence of the China Catholic Rainbow Community has been a consolation. Besides the head chapter and various chapters

set up in different regions, we have also a catechumen class and a Rosary prayer group. These allow gay Catholics who are puzzled to accompany and share with each other. It is important to note that there are a few priests, seminarians and religious sisters who do not fear the pressure and voluntarily stay with this community. There are many people coming from many different backgrounds and this brings to the group many things that they really need to discern about. We advocate a true friendship built on our faith in God, a friendship that encourages each other to live our own self to the fullest extent.

I represented the China Rainbow Witness Fellowship and the China Catholic Rainbow Community in the founding conference of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics (GNRC), which was held in Rome in October 2015. I was elected to be a steering member for youth affairs. At the conference, we drafted a letter and sent it to the Synod of Bishops to state our position. Not only can we dialogue with the Vatican officials, but we can also pass the messages of Chinese gay Catholics to the world. I am always moved by the faith of the gay Catholics who are loyal to the Church and who have a great love for Our Lady. Yet, I at the same time feel the pressure and pain they endure. When will the time come when our Holy Mother Church genuinely and generally embraces these kids, instead of merely saying "homosexual persons are called to chastity"?

There are at least 200,000 homosexuals among 10.5 million Catholic populations in China. What are their experiences? Who will listen to them when they suffer because they are gay? There is still a lot for us to do. Although this is a heavy responsibility to shoulder, we will not stop our mission even if there is repeated frustration.

LGBTQI+ Catholics in Hong Kong—If We Speak Out, Will We Be Listened To?

Yip Lai Shan[1]

It is not easy for me to write this article since the topic of my religious study is postcolonial and queer criticism. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is a scholar in the field of postcolonialism. Faced with the "otherness" constructed by the colonists, which made the indigenous inhabitants inferior in social status and demoralised them, she made a strong protest against it and asked: "Can the subaltern speak?" This raised the question of subjectivity.[2] This article will be based on Spivak's question, extending it and inducing more thinking about the subjectivity of gay people.

The magisterial documents on sexuality coming from the modern Catholic Church do not discuss the influence of colonialism. Although the Federation of the Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has always been concerned with inculturation, the specific impact of colonialism on sexuality has never yet been discussed directly. A postcolonial critique can provide an important viewpoint on the Church teaching on sexuality, which was shaped against the historical background of Europe. It can

---

[1] Yip Lai Shan is now a doctoral student at the Graduate Theological Union of the University of California, Berkeley. lyip@ses.gtu.edu.

[2] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1988); *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 308-11; Benita Parry, "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse," *Oxford Literary Review* 9:1-2 (1987): 35.

help to create greater understanding and respect for cultural differences when having a dialogue with indigenous cultures or local gay groups. Ann Laura Stoler noted that laws on sexuality are used to maintain the colonial order and that the sexual discourse classifies the subject of the colonisers and monitors the stagnation of imperial rule in the country.[3]

However, the adoption of postcolonial criticism does not mean a full acceptance of local culture without criticism or examination. The Hong Kong gay Catholics are the 'otherness' that survives in their niche in the aftermath of British colonialism, the Catholic tradition and Chinese culture. This status is indispensable for them to speak out for themselves as subjects and it also serves as an important reference point for moral discernment.

The pastoral principle of respecting human subjectivity

Cardinal John Tong of the Hong Kong Diocese mentioned this subjectivity in a pastoral letter discussing the working principle of pastoral workers, issued on September 29, 2014, on the eve of his participation in the meeting of the Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops having as its theme 'Proclaiming and Living the "Gospel of the Family"'.[4] The pastoral letter listed three principles for pastoral work: the first principle requires pastors to be the "compassionate companions"; the second is to be "compatible with Church teaching"; and the third states that "an essential dimension of authentic pastoral care is the identification of causes of confusion regarding Church teaching."

Cardinal Tong explains the first principle in his pastoral letter:

> The Church and her pastors need to have a 'listening heart' to reach out in solicitude, love and compassion to the person as a subject and not a mere object of pastoral care and concern, not to judge or condemn, but to respect the freedom and dignity of the person and accompany them along the difficult path towards wholeness and a fullness of life. The

[3] Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 145.

[4] See http://www.catholic.org.hk/v2/b5/message_bishop/y2014_family.pdf.

> Church must develop a sensitivity that would enable her to be able to pick up and respond to even the silent scream of every heart.

The pastoral letter says that all these pastoral principles would also apply to the pastoral care for people with same-sex attraction.

The essence of this pastoral principle is to respect people as human beings and to treat them as subjects, without judgment or condemnation, and to respect their human dignity and freedom: even their silent inner cry should be heard. It is only the highest level of care and concern that shows the Lord's care to the world. It is assumed that most gay persons are eager to meet such a pastor.

Specific pastoral work

The pastoral letter continues to discuss the pastoral work with people having same-sex attraction, essentially according to the Church teachings on same-sex sexuality, that is, it is sinful and these people need help to live in celibacy and avoid homosexual sex. The majority of gay Catholics must be well aware of this work. However, the biggest challenge is that if they cannot suppress their desire for the same sex and they encounter lovers who can support them, then they will, as moral subjects, respond with love according to their conscience and free will. Then, what kind of pastoral care can work in accordance with Church teaching while continuing to accompany and respect such subjects?

The letter also talks at length about children with gender dysphoria. It points out that delayed treatment of gender dysphoria will cause it to develop into same-sex inclination, and advises that the efficacy of treatments be carefully assessed. Apart from medical or interdisciplinary understanding and diagnosis, what attention will be given to the voice of those who as subjects experience gender anxiety or transgenderism?

How do gay persons understand themselves as persons? How do they live out their dignity? How do they live a life of faith and fulfilment?

Doesn't the voice of gay persons as subjects need to be taken into account in the pastoral letter? If not, how can the pastoral letter's discourse maintain respect for the voice of its subjects?

If gay persons appear to be silent, what is their inner cry? Can we hear it? What kind of cry do we hear clearly? What kind of cry do we

hear without listening to it? And, is there any cry that we can't hear or understand? These are probably the issues that need to be explored in the implementation of pastoral principles.

Epistemological violence

In the Church of Hong Kong, we have rarely been able to hear gay persons telling their own stories. In fact, it is the same case in China, Macau and Taiwan. While several gay Catholics in Hong Kong accepted the invitation to contribute a chapter in this book and share their personal faith journey and spiritual experience as a person overwhelmed by sexism and heterosexual hegemony: it is a chance that occurs once in a blue moon.

In Hong Kong, the discussion of homosexuality began in the 1980s, the Catholic Diocese of Hong Kong also supported decriminalisation. It did not strongly oppose the legislation against Discrimination by Sexual Orientation in the early 1990s. Since 2004, however, it has stirred up dissenting voices that led to the above-mentioned pastoral letter 'Proclaiming and Living the "Gospel of the Family"' by Cardinal Tong, as well as his guidelines on various levels of elections on November 5, 2015, which both clearly opposed this legislation.[5]

At the same time since 2003, a group of gay Catholics has begun to voice themselves in the public media in an attempt to break the silence, particularly to fight for the aforementioned anti-discrimination legislation. A more organised voice was heard from the Compassion HK LGBT Catholics Union. It responded to Cardinal Tong's stance on anti-discrimination legislation in the electoral guidelines in 2015.[6]

However, most gay Catholics are still relatively silent, as though deeply locked in the closet. They can hardly speak in complete freedom and thus the current discourse on the otherness of LGBTQI+ easily inflicts the "epistemological violence" referred to by Spivak. It has marginalised the voice of gays, with a muting effect. It goes further in that any general description of them brings hurt to this group of

---

5 See http://www.catholic.org.hk/v2/b5/message_bishop/20151105.html

6 See *May Your Lips Kiss Mine*, p.238-239.《天主爱人不歧视》

underprivileged.[7]

Therefore, when I discuss the situation of the gays, I should clarify some of the limits above so as not to reduce their chances of speaking out.

The community of gay Catholics in Hong Kong is itself very diverse. Even within the limited case-sharing in this book, the pluralistic nature of its sex/gender or faith expression is obvious. Although there are different ways of showing both contradiction and integration of the two identities, as gay and as Catholic, these cases also reveal perseverance, understanding and deepening of faith. When other people insist that homosexual behaviour is a sin, the stories of these gay Catholics show that besides same-sex behaviour, there are true feelings, true righteousness and real abundance of life! However, even though every gay individual is unique and diverse, all of them cry out from the depths of heterosexual hegemony.

Calling oneself gay is a process of self-awareness, self-exploration and self-acceptance, a process of expressing a personal and political definition of one's sex/gender, and a process of confirming one's own social position as the person that speaks out.

Most of the authors in this book no longer identify as 'homosexual' (the term applied by sexology) or as 'people with same-sex attraction' (the term applied by the Church), but as 'gays', who choose to speak out for themselves, to be a sign that shakes off the politics of lust of the heterosexual hegemony, and to be a human being created in the image of God; and even to be an ordinary theological subject that speaks and talks about God.

The authors in this collection of testimonies lay their experiences bare and cry out from the centre of their lives. All these are dedicated to the precious memory and history of this community. It is necessary for everybody to put aside their own judgments and listen to these faint inner cries, as if it were the breath of the Holy Spirit, so as to attain a more adequate understanding of them.

---

[7] Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?"; Thomas Teo, "What is Epistemological Violence in the Empirical Social Sciences?," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 4/5 (2010): 295–303.

The gay Catholics in Hong Kong have been making their voices heard. Once again they make their voices heard in this book. However, it is still not clear whether other people will hear them fully. If different people in the Church hear it, how can they start a dialogue where each speaker is equal and respectful of the other and resolve possible differences, so each person will not only listen to his own soliloquy? Also, how can we resolve the problems that have always hindered dialogue? Perhaps these difficult questions can only be answered by the whole Church together.

To show my appreciation and respect for the testimonies of these lives, rather than writing an analytical article, I think it would be more appropriate for me to write in the way in which life responds to life, that is, through my own experience in learning sexual ethics, so as to explore the circumstances in which gays speak out.

My learning experience

When I was young, my mother encouraged me to participate in different activities and learn new things. This was probably because she helped her parents in their work and never had the opportunity to join activities freely. I have a wide range of interests. My father is quite generous to his friends, so I like to help people too. However, my parents never encouraged me to be religious, but I enjoyed attending Mass, praying and saying the Rosary. I was fortunate enough to be cared for by some Catholic teachers when my family had problems later, so I was inspired to serve the community. The Catholic faith has pushed me to care more actively about social justice, which is a very challenging mission and one where I encountered the problem of discrimination against gay people.

In the Church, it is not easy to contact gay persons, even if you break through the taboos and show some understanding for the gays, or if you have more contact with them, churchgoers will soon give you a negative label, one that completely negates your personality, your faith, leaving you with a 'criminal record' for life. All those associated with you may also be stigmatised. This is just a reflection of the strong rejection and stigmatisation of gays.

In our society, education and ethical norms make us feel ashamed of wrongdoing. This is normal and only focuses on acts. But

stigmatisation targets a person, and the label that is imposed is only a one-sided understanding of the person. It is difficult to avoid the stigma of homosexuality in the Church, but you must only rely on God's forgiveness and compassion to guide you.

I was often misunderstood and unfairly treated, so I always wanted to help when I came across other people who experienced similar situations. In addition, my family problems made me realise deeply that it was not inevitable for people to love one another. It is worth cherishing the love we bear each other. So I began to care about the gay community and I found that many of them live in an abyss of fear of stigmatisation. This makes them hide themselves and become unusually isolated.

In 2003, some gay activists interrupted the Sunday Mass at the Cathedral, and then after the wave of discussion of the anti-discrimination legislation, a fear of homosexuality arose in the Protestant and Catholic Churches and the gay movement was seen as a scourge.

When I was working for the Church, my colleagues designed a questionnaire to find out how the faithful care about society. The questionnaire asked about same-sex marriage in terms of human rights awareness. When the results of the questionnaire were reported, it was queried why the question had been placed within the scope of human rights: same-sex marriage was not part of human rights according to Church teaching. For non-Catholic colleagues, it is obvious that the Western human rights issues are a useful frame of reference, and this will not equate all issues with Church teaching. For example, if a questionnaire asks whether the faithful has ever had an abortion, in order to provide relevant pastoral care, would conducting such a survey mean endorsing abortion? Of course not! The same suspicion could have occurred if the parish social concern groups' questionnaire had asked "How much do the faithful agree with Church teaching?" Why should it ask if they agree or not? It can be assumed that they agree or else it might induce the faithful to disagree.

The turn of events was that although I was not named at the time, I was accused of writing in a publication of a group supporting same-sex marriage during the discussion of the questionnaire. The article, written in 2005, mainly talks about how the late Pope John Paul II did not allow some topics to be discussed in the Church during his office.

If the article had been just a reflection on the Church's handling of controversial issues, it probably would not have hit a nerve among the top authorities of the Church. Though the article does mention sex/gender, homosexuality and other issues on sexuality at the beginning, it immediately climbs into generalities. Even though the second part of the article focused on reflection, it seems that it was too difficult to be listened to.

If they had reminded me that it was a personal religious reflection on the occasion of public discussion of the questionnaire, it would have been a benevolent sort of reminder. However, as the two events were associated, my personality was clearly stigmatised. If I am found to be wrong, should I not be given an appropriate occasion to explain myself and clarify my position as the first step? Or was it just because of the mention of sex that there was no room for defence?

There is a strong fear aroused by all sexual or homosexual issues, and this can easily lead to prejudice concerning the stigma attached to misconduct. There are often fierce debates over the implementation of social teaching or pastoral work, but there is no issue other than sexuality that is so likely to lead to stigmatisation.

I can only sigh: would it be better to live by the motto of the Hong Kong civil servants—"Doing less, means less mistakes; doing nothing means no mistakes"? Would it be a good thing if everyone were smart enough to know which way the wind blows and so be submissive? What troubles would arise through such a policy?

I have always been deeply attracted by the teaching of caring for the weak and loving one's own self: this drew me towards baptism. I could not help but explore the subject of sexual morality and therefore consider the need for further education. However, it is always a very sensitive issue, so I needed to spend some time on a retreat to reach discernment.

At that time, the Biblical passage that I thought most profound was the beginning of the Book of Jeremiah: "Your responsibility is to root up and to pull down, to waste and to destroy, to build and to plant."(1:10) I realised that this was another special vocation in life, a process of growing up with God and myself, so I pursued my study in the spirit of seeking knowledge. Since the issue of sexuality is sensitive, it requires a space for learning and discussion that encourages critical thinking, while

being open, safe and gay-friendly: I finally chose a theological seminary with a higher tuition fee.

When I learn and understand things from different perspectives, it informs me of different ways of logical thinking. And looking at the history of sexual morality in the Church, I realised that if the Church were to make an in-depth study of its own history, it would learn more about itself and achieve deeper introspection, which would be helpful for it in its dialogue with people holding different views.

Although I had acquired plenty of learning and experience during my study, there was still a problem for me about how to convert that learning into a future academic career after my PhD study was accepted. How many Catholic universities and seminaries would bear the stigmatisation involved in research into sexual issues and a critique of moral doctrine?

These structural obstacles, coupled with my own financial crisis in the aftermath of the worldwide financial tsunami, could cause difficulties in my future employment. As a result, my teachers encouraged me to submit my articles to academic journals. But I was also worried about being labelled and demonised, and at first, I fell into self-censorship to the extent that I chose to give up in the end. At that time, I finally realised that speaking out with my own voice was not a basic human right readily available, but only a privilege reserved for a few people.

The atmosphere of difficulty in discussing sexual issues is not a recent affair. Prior to the promulgation of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae Vitae* in 1968, Pope John XXIII had consulted the bishops around the world about population control, family and birth control in 1963, but Paul VI did not adopt the recommendations of "most of the reports" (that was to modify the original Church teaching and in some cases accept artificial contraception), and he did not allow the issue to be settled by the world's bishops in the Second Vatican Council held during 1962-1965. He retained the original Church teaching in his encyclical and made use of his role as the pope.[8]

---

[8] Vincent J Genovesi, *In Pursuit of Love: Catholic Morality and Human Sexuality*, 2nd Ed. (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), 190; John Maloney, *The Making of Moral Theology* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 266-7.

After that, the teachings of the modern Church on sexuality gradually became the affair of the Vatican as the centre of decision. While Vatican II opened the window of the Church to dialogue with the world, it seemed difficult to apply its decisions to the issue of sexuality. Some theologians were punished by disciplinary action or prohibited from making public statements for their dissident views and opinions.[9]

A chilling effect set in, making it difficult to find a safe space in which to discuss the issue of homosexuality. Faced with the chilling effect, the more we try to avoid it, the more readily it will be internalised and the more its effects will grow. A safe and honest dialogue with trust will be hard to create. In Hong Kong, the mobilisation strategy of the Christian right-wing further enhanced this chilling effect. It was not until the World Synod of 2014 and 2015 that Pope Francis asked dissenting voices to join the discussion. The chilling effect only began to disappear when there was no stigmatisation or the temptation to settle scores at an opportune moment.

Each individual is responsible for his own academic disclosure, but labelling and stigmatisation is a matter of social ethics. I can't resist all these alone! Concerning my future and the direction of my life, I struggled hard and questioned my decision. Who would stake his life's savings on a study likely to give 'no result'? Why do I get myself into trouble rather than give myself an easy life? Why don't I take people's kind advice and choose a non-sensitive research topic? Or if I just follow the official doctrine in my study, might it not lead me to the road to success? But what is really my vocation?

Of course I told myself that I could do other jobs if I didn't get work in academia or in the Church. But would I still have a dream to live by? Doesn't this corrupt society have many people who want a secure life so much that they give up the ideal of public welfare? If nobody steps forward to speak out, where will there be a real discussion? My head

---

[9] John J McNeil, *Taking a chance on God: Liberating Theology for Gays, Lesbians, and Their Lovers, Families, and Friends* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 223-241; Maurice Shinnick, *The Remarkable Gift: Being Gay and Catholic* (Australia: Alllen & Unwin, 1997), 65-72; Robert Nugent and Jeannine Grammick, *Building Bridges: Gay & Lesbian Reality and the Catholic Church* (CT: Twenty-Third, 1992), 146-156.

was at war.

At the beginning of my study, I prided myself on still being young and I often stayed up late and even overnight to catch up with my homework. I also insisted on doing a part-time job to earn a little income. In the end, my health was damaged and the pain in my shoulder became chronic. Although I was fortunate enough to have some very thoughtful friends who supported my study, I developed skin diseases under the pressure of an unknown future, the financial burden and an unjust fate. The sores on my skin were often so painful and itchy that they woke me up in the middle of the night. Finally, I had to suspend my study and return to Hong Kong for treatment.

My family supported me to continue my study. But they were not Church members. I did not want to disclose to them what was happening in the Church and I could not share my stress with them. They also could not understand why my health declined. I lived at home, but the feeling of loneliness was extremely strong.

My health got worse and I became more vulnerable as I also lost my economic power. I once met some relatives and friends who did not understand my financial difficulties; they despised me and looked down on me. My heart was broken, my self-esteem was shattered. I could not blame them because they knew nothing of the situation.

Because of these difficulties, I deeply realised the importance of job security, so we cannot ignore the poverty of others nor easily deny the importance of legislation to safeguard against discrimination based on sexual orientation. I believed that if a person's first-hand experience is one of relying on government subsidies to survive or losing his economic autonomy and being despised in his lifetime, he should have a deep feeling for those who face prejudice when seeking employment.

When gay people face stigmatisation and lack protection from discrimination in society, they will eventually have difficulty finding room for survival. Therefore, stigma and discrimination must be abolished.

Conclusion of my study

I first persisted in my study and even published an academic article

without much concern, but I had to give up the study in the end due to my health situation.

I wrote a summary of my learning experiences at the time when I decided to give it up. For example: the first aspect was about the four sources of knowledge in moral theology—human experience, rational knowledge, the Bible and Church traditions, all of which are equally important.[10] However, since the culture of society has given gay experience a bad name, and placed it under stigma, their experience as moral subjects can hardly be regarded as moral knowledge. So it cannot reach an equitable dialogue with the other three sources of knowledge, and finally, the subjectivity of gay people is completely obliterated.

The second aspect is Chinese culture and history, which was once tolerant towards same-sex relations or multiple sex/gender expressions. However, when China was invaded by strong Western powers, the Western fear of homosexuality replaced the original tolerant attitude. In this historical situation, how the Church might have adapted its sexual morality is a subject that needs careful study. However, when the Catholic Church and the native culture are unanimous on certain subjects, it does not mean that there is no problem: for example, on the question of patriarchy, do they have two different views, or do they support the same idea?

The third aspect is that the religious right-wing creates a moral panic in order to organise its supporters and mobilise them, and this is enough to affect the prudence of the whole moral or ethical judgment. Fear weakens people's charitable heart and rational judgment. In addition, the religious right-wing tends to promote its political and economic agenda in the name of religion or to take advantage of the religious sentiments of believers.

The fourth aspect is stigmatisation and internalisation of shame. In the area of sexual regulations, various organisations in modern society carry out humiliation or stigmatisation through different channels. Many gay Catholics carry with them and internalise a strong feeling of shame due to the Church teachings on homosexuality. It makes it hard

[10] Margaret A Farley, *Just Love: A Framework for Christian Sexual Ethics* (New York and London: Continuum, 2008), 182-196.

for them to make their own voices heard as subjects. The more they hide themselves, the more their shame is internalised. Or, in order to pacify their internalised shame, gay Catholics orient themselves by excessively following discipline, the mainstream, or authority so as to avoid further shame. This makes it easy for society to repeat the same mistake by humiliating the minorities, the dissidents, or people who are different from the norm.

The fifth aspect is the challenge of Catholicism in the face of secularism and the separation of Church and state. When the Catholic Church lays down its authoritative position in the public domain of politics, economy or culture in Europe, what remains of its authority is defined as the private sphere, such as personal morality, family and religious beliefs. Under the principle of separation of Church and state, the Church has slowly sought to dialogue with the secular societies, and has taken the universal values of the secular society as a channel for learning and cooperating with others, and so recovers the contribution of religion to the secular society. Vatican II's 'Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World' reflects this direction. Therefore, when sex and family issues are no longer fully regarded as belonging to the private sphere, the authority of the Church is challenged by the secular society. The continual search for universal values can be a way out, so that the contribution of Church on secularisation, modernisation and rationality is not completely denied.

Facing my learning experience, it was obvious to me that it allowed a rich discussion and my fear was replaced by love. But given that I had to give up my study, endless heartaches and guilt struggled in my heart; I simply could not let go of my original call. So I decided to return to my truest moment, not to worry about my future, but to seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness, to heal my physical and spiritual being and get back on my track. I will just strive to do my best.

Even if I cannot completely control my future, God will have His way of fulfilling His call to me. He has been sending His angels to help me learn a valuable lesson in my life. While I experienced deep fear or hurt, there was also the same depth of forgiveness, as well as the same depth of love that I could give. Only when I faced my situation squarely, could I totally lay down my burdens. Now I can let go of my worries and my

concern for being accepted and understood and regard the happiness of other people as my joy.

I choose to believe again, hoping that this is not just a moment passing before my eyes. In the histories of many pioneers, their acts were complemented by God's salvation. Their courage and intelligence are my blessing and inspiration.

During my recovery, I was fortunate enough to meet some gay Catholic friends who encouraged me to go ahead. I would like to encourage other gay people here by saying that it is natural for all of you to see yourselves as moral and theological subjects. Your stories are also sources of moral knowledge.

Some people may think that I am very brave, but this is definitely not the case. I am still under the temptation of fear and my physical strain has not fully disappeared. This makes me often blame myself for being stubborn. I still question my vocation and want to give it up when I am worried about my life or my future.

However, I am still persisting, on the one hand, because my stubborn and perfectionist personality makes me not easily satisfied with simple answers. On the other hand, with the support and help of others, the sense of mission, devotion and love that I have cultivated in the Church for many years can be brought into play. Of course, the most important thing is to thank God who gave me everything, including other people's devotion to me so that I can only insist on finishing this difficult lesson.

If I share my experience, it is not to scare people who want to stand up and speak out. I just want to let gay people realise that their loneliness is shared by others. I also experienced fear of homosexuality in society and in the Church, the fear of losing my original life or my privileges, the fear of denying fault, the fear of being unable to understand the suffering of others, and the stigmatisation caused by fear.

My experience also testifies to the fact that it is hard for a person's impetus to stand up to stigmatisation. However, many people are willing to make the energy of love bloom in place of fear and replace fear as the theme of life. Love, of course, is not the same as being free from pain, but instead, where there is love, there is pain.

My experience can be used to witness that the publication of this

book today is a wonderful work of God!

The reflections of '*Amoris laetitia*' on the application of natural law

In my above-mentioned reflection article written in 2005, I pointed out that we should not just take the moral high ground, but enter into a concrete human path and continue to explore it and discuss it. Fortunately, this point of view is similar to §305 in the apostolic exhortation *Amoris laetitia* (The Joy of Love), just issued by Pope Francis, which talks about the complexities of pastoral life.[11]

The exhortation considers that it is not enough to simply apply the moral law to those who live in unusual situations. It would be like throwing stones at them. It also cites the International Theological Commission's view on natural law that it should not be an established set of rules to be imposed on the moral subject. Instead, it should be seen as a source of objective inspiration in the process of deep personal choice.

The exhortation continues to point out that, owing to the constraints of various circumstances, one can be subjectively not entirely guilty in an objectively sinful situation. When one sees things only in black or white, this sometimes excludes Grace and closes the path towards growth, destroying a possible way of becoming a saint. If this point applies to homosexual acts, there is a similar conclusion that a person may not be completely sinful on a subjective level, even if their behaviour is objectively a disorder or confusion.

So, how should people deal with this contradiction of being objectively sinful but at the same time, subjectively, not completely sinful? Perhaps we can obtain a clue from the exhortation §308, where it mentions that some people prefer more rigid pastoral work to avoid any gray areas or situations that might lead to confusion. Pope Francis believes that Jesus wants the Church to welcome the goodness that the Holy Spirit has introduced into human weakness. When pastors tell their congregations about the ideal of the Gospel and the reality of Church

[11] See http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20160319_amoris-laetitia_en.pdf.

teachings, they also need to assist them to be kind and caring to the weak and avoid harsh judgments. Jesus expects us to enter into the chaos of the lives of others and to recognise the power of gentleness. When we do this, our lives will become wonderfully complex.

For a long time, the natural law applied to gays was presented as a set of rules that could not be changed. This made it difficult for it to be a source of objective inspiration in the person's journey of exploration toward sanctification. Now, perhaps it is time for our gay friends to become more active as theological and moral subjects, to speak out and continue to identify and open up the way to sanctification. They do not need to live in shame, in the dark closet of humiliation and loneliness!

A Reflection on Love Amid Controversies Over Same-Sex Marriage

Compassion Hong Kong

> "The controversy about homosexuality is the touchstone for all Christians who claim to practice the teaching of loving each other and caring for the youngest."
>
> "Some still believe that the Church is a place to love each other, and they strive to prove that they're 100 percent devoted Catholics. They are still waiting for the day when the Church and other Christians will accept them as homosexuals. Is that fair for the homosexual community? Perhaps, the controversy about homosexuality is the touchstone for all Christians who claim to practice the teaching of loving each other and caring for the youngest… Why can't our society be more civilised, allowing us to practice one of the most fundamental values in human society—love? Perhaps, the controversy about homosexuality is the touchstone for human civilisation."

The US Supreme Court legalised same-sex marriages on June 26, 2015. Soon, it was Pride Day in the United States. Facebook immediately provided a free service to add a rainbow-themed frame to the user's profile picture. This rainbow trend has taken Hong Kong by storm. Catholics and Protestants in Hong Kong were also active in discussing this highly controversial matter of same-sex marriage on Facebook. Although it is an issue of love, the controversy has unfortunately turned into a bout of slandering of homosexuals.

Here, we have recorded some members' reflections on the debate, hoping to inspire further thoughts.

"I felt very frustrated, not because of myself, but because I saw my good friend had shared thoughts on the possibility of accepting same-sex marriages. Several group members were hurt by the Catholic Church and its followers again in these discussions. I can't feel any kindness coming to us from these conservative Church members. In their eyes, homosexual behaviour and love and same-sex marriages are all wrong. If any Church member is found to be homosexual, he/she must be expelled to avoid disgracing the Catholic Church and God. They often say they love all homosexual brothers and sisters, but their denial of same-sex marriage shows a selfish and completely loveless attitude. They often talk about helping and listening to all homosexual brothers and sisters, but they just want to alter our sexual orientation. This is sugar-coated poison!"

"Our homosexual identity is blessed! The US Supreme Court's decision on same-sex marriage not only brings us joy, but it also reminds us that this battle against ignorance and hatred is far from won. In some places, all forms of same-sex marriage are prohibited, preventing same-sex couples from forming a family. Some Catholics or Protestants often impose right-wing ideology on us, in Hong Kong and Taiwan.

When I see some members, who have yet to be baptised, stand up for themselves, with the image of God in their heart, I always feel touched. Whenever a good friend expresses the desire to be baptised, I naturally recommend Catholicism. But I always worry that they might be brainwashed into some homophobic and unconscionable ethics. At first, I thought the Cathedral Church of Saint John the Evangelist was a good choice. Later, we realised how disturbing it was that Archbishop Kwong compared Chairman Mao to God. My friend and I have also considered Blessed Ministry Community Church (a gay-friendly church in Hong Kong), but we both prefer traditional liturgy.

I believe we can prevent the harm inflicted on us by those conservative churches. After all, we must discern and judge what is the Good News for us with our conscience and the Holy Spirit as our guide."

"I think it is impossible to have any meaningful discussion with religious fanatics these days. They're basically repeating themselves and deviating from the facts. As the saying goes: the same knife cuts bread and fingers. Religion can inspire people to be good, but it can

also nurture extremists. Have we Christians truly been living a life that shows the true meaning of faith? Have we been reflecting on our actions?"

"If I hadn't met this group of friends, I would have gone crazy and probably left the Church. I could not experience the love that Christ spoke of. It was like meeting a troop of Pharisees!

A foreign priest pointed out in his blog: Nothing other than homosexuality has generated such great hatred among Catholics in the past few decades. I hold the same view. The Catholic catechism demands us to be 'respectful, sensible and caring' to our brothers and sisters with a homosexual orientation. But God wants us to do more, that is, love. True love, not a kind of distorted and narrow-minded tolerance, which would be condemnation, command and exhortation disguised as love. The genuine manifestation of love is getting to know homosexuals, spending time with them, listening to them, being challenged by them, wishing them well, and hoping that they become a part of your life. Treat them the same as you treat your heterosexual friends. Love should be the top priority, and everything else is secondary. In fact, without love, everything else is meaningless."

"I have heard a Christian share her experience, and it deserves some thoughts. She said that she cannot condemn anyone because she is also a sinner. She is neither God nor a theologian. She does not know how to use the holy Scripture to define sins. If a gay friend invites her to their wedding, she will attend because she wants to follow God's example of love. No matter what, in a happy or sorrowful situation, God is always with us. Although Jesus washed Judas' feet and kissed him, it did not corrupt His honour and prominence!"

"If we want to maintain family values and protect children, why not use the same efforts to condemn those celebrities who have multiple wives? Or the one-child policy that leads to many orphans? Or the government-capitalist collusion and real estate hegemony, which bring us appalling work benefits and a series of housing problems? If these are issues of social justice, what kind of families are we protecting? Middle-class families? Expectations of the middle-class parents for their children? Are other families not worthy of protection? Is it because the

homosexual community is a minority in society, so they are easier to bully? They receive all sorts of nasty criticism when they want to marry someone they love. Meanwhile, many abandoned babies in mainland China are being adopted by American lesbian families. But how many of those who often claim to protect family values and children would adopt orphans to share their family love with them?

"It is doubtful that the infertility of the LGBTQI+ community endangers human society. For more than 2,000 years, the Church has encouraged people to observe celibacy, established many religious congregations, and has never worried about human extinction. At present, the more probable causes for human extinction include starvation and the lack of basic living requirements caused by poverty, accidents and occupational illnesses caused by dangerous working environments as a result of exploitation of labour, mass killings and refugees caused by war, environmental damage and food pollution caused by 'natural disasters' and human negligence, illnesses caused by modern lifestyles and a sense of purposelessness and various kinds of discrimination against human life and dignity...

If same-sex couples do not bear or raise children, then just don't give them relevant welfare. It is not necessary to deprive them of their right to wed. People who are getting married in their middle or old age cannot bear children either, but they are not barred from marriage."

"When Jesus talked about divorce, he meant to condemn the men at the time who divorced their wives at will to marry another one: the abandoned women lost everything they could rely on because they had a very low social status. He urged those men to let go of their family expectations and take good care of their wives, instead of using them as a tool to consolidate the status of the family. They should become one with their wives and must not treat them as disposable. If Jesus were to meet present-day gay couples, he might do the same thing and urge them to cherish each other.

Even if the Church tells you that same-sex behaviour is sinful, it cannot deny that the love between two homosexual individuals is sincere. As Justice Kennedy, an associate justice of the US Supreme Court, pointed out in his judgment in the same-sex marriage case, 'Marriage embodies the highest ideals of love, fidelity, devotion,

sacrifice, and family.' Same-sex couples are capable of living a life faithful to each other and demonstrate their respect for marriage. They seek ways for them to strengthen their ties because they have a deep respect for each other. They only wish not to be condemned, or be forced to live alone, or be rejected from one of the oldest traditions of human civilisation. Hence, they ask the law to grant them equal rights and dignity. Perhaps Christians who believe that homosexuality is a sin can try to tolerate same-sex marriage, as Jesus once said, 'Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—as she has shown great love' (Luke 7:47)."

"It's often said, 'love the homosexual but hate their homosexual behaviour.' Just as parents love their children, but not their evil deeds. But the love here becomes quite hollow! The way our Heavenly Father shows His love for man is to love both the righteous and the unrighteous. When will we learn to be like our Heavenly Father and share our love equally with homosexuals? Although Jesus talked about love, it was not only about parental love, nor was it about how I do something to you for your own good. He sacrificed Himself for His friends and everyone in the world. Now when it comes to protecting sexual minorities from discrimination, they act like it's the biggest enemy yet, unwilling to sacrifice a little for achieving equality. That is not the way forward!

Before his death, Jesus told his disciples to love each other and stated that this was his command to his disciples! When discussing homosexuality, many rarely reflect on or practice Jesus Christ's most important teaching. Ever since the support for decriminalising homosexual behaviour and the law against discrimination according to sexual orientation was voted more than 30 years ago, not much has been done to help the homosexual to be a whole person: who has desires, emotions, and can laugh and cry, who should be free to love anyone instead of being forced to abandon their feelings. Very few priests and church members truly accept gay people. Most of the time, they say gay people should not be discriminated against, but they will not try to understand why they are being rejected. It's difficult to find church documents analysing the causes of discrimination in this aspect."

"The Church's current attitude on homosexuality is that it is not a sin, but it's a tendency to be 'morally evil' and 'objectively disordered.' They don't realise how derogatory it is to a gay person! Every time homosexuality is being discussed, they often come up with verses from the Bible or Church teaching materials, arguing for the sinfulness of it. Even in a rational discussion, like this recent example about same-sex marriage, if anyone proposes that we should not stone gay people, someone will usually reply, 'But Jesus told the woman to sin no more!' But what they don't realise is that Jesus did not hold fast to the radical part of the religious/social tradition, which resulted in a strong impact on the people, on the social systems, on the religious emotions, and on religious dogmatism.

Some people will jump up and say, 'If you don't agree with the Church's teachings, then please leave!' It is almost like a challenge to fight. It reminds me of that time when the apostles were arguing who was the greatest and Jesus said, 'If any man desires to be first, the same shall be last of all, and servant of all' (Mark 9:35). Honestly, should you cut off a limb just because it was criticised and shameful to you?"

"Most of the gay people in the Church are unable to speak up. They know that it is difficult to be accepted, let alone share the love of Jesus Christ! Jesus Christ gave us many teachings. He pointed out that we would be judged for whether we have practiced the teaching of caring for the least of our brethren. Shouldn't this be used as a guideline in judging if one has sinned? Every time the Church talks about homosexuality, they demand that gay people practise abstinence, or even change their sexual orientation. They never try to understand how miserable life becomes for gay people who are forced to shun their feelings. If pastoral services fail to comprehend the seriousness of this problem, then what have they been doing? No wonder gay people feel that they have been constantly whipped and blamed.

In fact, many homosexual people have given up hope of being accepted by the Church, and some of them have left the Church. If they can be true to themselves, they are happy enough. After all, it is already tough enough to deal with the discrimination they face in society. They may not give up their belief in God though... Of course, some will choose to stay in the Church and feel that it is not their own fault that the Church has been solely focusing on one aspect of homosexuality. It

is not the true meaning of faith. In the Church, who isn't a sinner after all? But it should be a place where people choose to forgive and forget. Some still believe that the Church is a place to love each other, and they strive to prove that they're 100 percent devoted Catholics. They are still waiting for the day when the Church and other Christians will accept them as homosexuals. Is that fair for the homosexual community? Perhaps, the controversy about homosexuality is the touchstone for all Christians who claim to practice the teaching of loving each other and caring for the youngest.

Some gay couples have to leave their hometowns and go to a distant place to find a society that accepts them. Why can't our society be more civilised, allowing us to practice one of the most fundamental values in human society—love? Perhaps, the controversy about homosexuality is the touchstone for human civilisation."

The Taiwanese Catholic Church's Attitude Towards Homosexuality

Philip

The same-sex marriage movement has come under the spotlight in Taiwan in recent years. Over the past 10 years or so, many gay rights activists in the field of education, social work or psychology have succeeded in promoting gender equality education and integrating it into mainstream education. At the same time, Christian communities in Taiwan have gradually gathered force, strongly opposing the 'gay movement' and have tried to fight for the right to speak about education on gender equality.

The specific response of the Taiwan Catholic Church was to join the Family Guardian Coalition. Additionally, the Bishops' Conference published a pastoral letter to defend Catholic family values in 2013. This letter caused quite an uproar, however. In the past, pastoral letters rarely criticised a specific civil community directly. Also, the Bishops' pastoral letters were seldom widely circulated and discussed on the internet by non-Catholics. A search on the internet suggests that the bishops did not give these discussions much of a response.

According to *UCA News*, the secretary-general of the Bishops' Conference of Taiwan frequently attended press conferences organised by the Family Guardian Coalition. His remarks were often quoted by the media. However, they left a negative impression not only for the LGBTQI+ community, but also for many Catholics who were in support of gay rights and expressed their strong doubts concerning his views. In contrast, Pope Francis, who has expressed the attitude of the Church on

this matter in various ways without altering the Church's stance,[1] was able to offer a refreshing image of the Church in many countries. In the same vein, according to the *Catholic Weekly*, during the Christmas Midnight Mass in 2014, John Hung Shan-chuan, the Archbishop of Taipei, publicly appealed to Church members to accept and not discriminate against the LGBTQI+ community despite the fact that Catholic doctrine does not accept homosexual behaviour. In contrast, a lot of the representatives of the Catholic Church in Taiwan seemed interested in attending press conferences held by the Family Guardian Coalition while disregarding other issues, such as the abolition of the death penalty, opposition to euthanasia, opposition to surrogate mothers, etc., all of which are issues with which the Church should be concerned.

It is understood that some Catholics have accompanied gay Catholics and their parents to meet with the bishops responsible for family care. Unfortunately, upholding the doctrinal belief of the Church, the bishops firmly expressed their opposition to a social movement attempting to alter the marriage system through legal amendments. The Christian Life Community once organised a symposium on the 2014 Diversified Family Bill, sharing the faithful's actual experiences in getting to know the LGBTQI+ community, as well as professional legal opinions on the relevant draft laws. Some priests who are specialised in spiritual counselling and professional psychological counselling also shared their views. However, the event was derided as 'appeasing' the LGBTQI+ community by conservative Catholics.

The Catholic population in Taiwan is small, and the number of LGBTQI+ Catholics has yet to be large enough to build a parish specifically catering to the LGBTQI+ community. It is therefore very challenging for LGBTQI+ Catholics to maintain both of their identities, especially when they are, due to the lack of family life, becoming more

[1] In an interview with Father Antonio Spadaro, editor-in-chief of *La Civilta Cattolica*, in late August 2013, the Pope said, "I see the Church as a field hospital after battle. It is useless to ask a seriously injured person if he has high cholesterol level and about the level of his blood sugars! You have to heal his wounds. Then we can talk about everything else. Heal the wounds, heal the wounds. We have to find a new balance, otherwise even the moral edifice of the Church is likely to fall like a house of cards."

and more alienated from a lay community always emphasising family life. When facing a lack of support and recognition from other church members, many gay Catholics chose to fade out of their church life. A few of them choose to attend other Christian churches which are friendly to the LGBTQI+ community. Most have simply left the church. This was especially true in 2016 during the legislative process concerning same-sex marriage, when the Catholic Church in Taiwan expressed an extreme stance, even going hand-in-hand with the Unification Church which is considered fundamentally and doctrinally heretical. Many young Catholics were angered, even submitting articles to the *Apple Daily* directly pointing out how "very abhorrent" Father Chen's remark was. However, the Churches in Taiwan did not respond to this kind of direct criticism.

Generally speaking, younger Catholics have a higher level of acceptance toward the LGBTQI+ community. Future pastoral work is bound to require more pastoral workers with such sensitivity. Therefore, it is inevitable that a caring dialogue should begin to gain mutual understanding, to assist the Church in learning how to manage the pastoral care of this community and their families, to teach parishes how to deal with the doubts raised by other faithful, and to deal with harmful speeches and questions.

Recognising the existence of this group of LGBTQI+ church members, it would be a more suitable form of evangelisation for the Catholic Church in Taiwan to respect these Catholics' life choices and their own process of searching for God, to accompany church members with different family lifestyles and life choices and to help them build communion with God. The Catholic Church is not excessively traditional. It also values the depth of spirituality. It should be enough to provide for the LGBTQI+ community, who are more open to accepting the faith of the Gospel. It is a pity that the Catholic Church in Taiwan, limited by a generally low-quality clergy, is moving in the opposite direction.

On Consecrated Life

Br Xiao Bei

Editor's note: Many religious people reduce chastity to abstinence. Abstinence and indulgence are always two extremes of a pendulum swinging back and forth. Breaking a vow of chastity is a problem for some gay and straight religious people. Some Church members have highly negative attitudes towards homosexuals becoming priests. Can a gay person become a qualified priest? This article by Brother Xiao Bei reinforced my confidence. The Church, the seminary, and the gay community should work together to help discover the people like Henri Nouwen[1] or Mychal Judge,[2] and accompany the others to make choices they will never regret.

"Chastity is not about what is lost, but what is found: Chastity is to be in love with God."

A homosexual orientation is neither a stumbling block to a religious life, nor the cornerstone for choosing a consecrated life.

I am a religious brother with a homosexual orientation. Some people think that people with a homosexual orientation have no desire

[1] Henri Nouwen (1932-1996), was a Dutch Catholic priest and one of the most influential spiritual writers of the 20th century. His work profoundly reflects on suffering, spirituality, psychology and more. His homosexual orientation is generally known, but there is no evidence that he broke his vow. See https://qspirit.net/henri-nouwen-homosexuality/

[2] Mychal Judge (1933-2001), was an American Franciscan friar who served as a chaplain to the New York City Fire Department. While serving in that capacity he was killed, becoming the first certified fatality of the September 11, 2001 attacks. His homosexual orientation is generally known, but there is no evidence that he broke his vow. See https://www.newwaysministry.org/2021/09/11/lets-make-father-mychal-judge-a-saint/

to get married, are immune to the opposite sex, and thus are suitable for a consecrated life. Others believe that a gay person cannot marry, and that a consecrated life is the best way to obtain a reasonable social status. There are also some who believe that a homosexual orientation is a gift from God, and they should live out this call to celibacy. Some brothers from the Catholic Rainbow Group of God asked me if I chose my consecrated life because of my homosexual orientation. I neither admit nor deny it. Sex is an important part of life, but not everything. My homosexual orientation is a reason for me to pursue a religious life, but it is not the main reason. Living a consecrated life has nothing to do with sexual orientation.

Now a religious man has three mountains and three magical treasures: the three vows of chastity, obedience and poverty. Looking at all kinds of disputes and injustices in the world, they are all motivated by sex, power and money. These three are the devil's chips to seduce human beings and they are the magic treasures for worldly men to pursue as virtues.

Jesus drove the devil away three times (Matt 4: 1-11). It was not just literally driving away the devil as written in the Bible. If the devil was a visible speaker, all enlightened people would be able to resist him. The devil that Jesus drove away was rather a kind of demon in our heart. The devil's three temptations of Jesus, as I understand them, were three temptations of physiology, psychology and belief.

Physiology (Chastity)

Jesus had fasted for 40 days and 40 nights. He then became hungry (Matt 4: 2). I think Jesus was not only hungry after 40 days. He was very hungry all through the time. He may have drunk water but did not eat, so he was very weak and very hungry for food. Similarly, I long for sex long after abstinence, not only after abstinence, but often during abstinence. But I can learn from Jesus to resist temptations and use other methods to relieve my sexual desire, just like drinking water to relieve hunger.

"If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread!" (Matt 4: 3). This sort of voice often spoke in my mind, saying

things like "If you like him, pursue him!" "Since you have a desire, give in to it!" and so on. As a gay brother, I face greater challenges than the heterosexual religious brothers. In the world of pure men like in the seminary, a group of masculine sons eat, live, study, and pray together, so temptations are around every day. Compared to heterosexual religious brothers, I have more temptations. If living a consecrated life is a sort of martyrdom, then I think that a gay person living a consecrated life can be described as martyrdom in martyrdom.

Facing the devil's temptation, Jesus said, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matt 4: 4). No normal man can live an asexual life unless he lives in God. When my sexual desire is extremely strong, I will use another layer of meaning to encourage myself "man shall not live on sex alone but on every holy duty given by the hands of God." Because the scripture says "Food is for the stomach and the stomach is for food, but God will do away with both of them. Yet the body is not for immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord is for the body" (1 Corinthians 6:13).

Chastity is not about what is lost, but what is found: Chastity is to be in love with God.

Psychological (Obedience)

The Church develops through change and advances in development. The Church's theology and philosophy developed from scratch, to become excellent. The Church fathers, heresies, saints and schisms, things and figures of the Church come and go in history. There are a lot of arguments at present about right and wrong, and there the Church's definitions may be different thousands of years from now. For instance, the Church changed its stance towards slavery. Personally, although I uphold celibacy, I think the Church needs to accept and bless same-sex marriage.

But I am also often tempted by this: When I listen to the voice of the Holy Spirit (does fighting gay rights come from the call of the Holy Spirit?), the Holy Spirit will guide me not to make mistakes. This temptation is similar to: "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning you'; and 'On their hands, they will bear you up, so that you will not strike your foot

against a stone'" (Matt 4: 6). And Jesus countered this seemingly plausible temptation: "You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test!" (Matt 4: 7). Therefore, when faced with the issues of same-sex marriage or union, I often say to myself, "Don't put the Holy Spirit, my God, to the test!" Although there are many things I don't understand, I don't know, and I do not want to know, the model of Our Lady tells me to bear these things in mind. Take a step back: Church members should obey the Church, but what if I am wrong...

Belief (Poverty)

The devil may say to us, "All these things I will give you if you fall down and worship me" (Matt 4:9). Or he said, "You should pursue wealth, you can have it all." To the monk, he might even say, "You should maintain your life so that you can preach well."

Indeed, many times I have been pursuing wealth, comforting myself by saying, "A gentleman loves money. Obtain it the right way and use it correctly. It is for evangelisation." However, God said, "You shall worship the Lord, your God, and serve Him alone" (Matt 4:10). "No one can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matt 6:24).

Then what should I do? After all, I have to survive! Man shall not live by bread alone, but he still has to depend on bread. So I turned to pray to the Virgin Mary to take care of my life so that I don't need to worry about my survival and can concentrate on worshipping God. Thanks to Our Lady, she offered help to my life through many brothers and sisters, so that I am not rich but I do not lack anything.

When my faith is firm in God himself, wealth is just a neutral tool that God gives me. In a materialistic world, it really requires great faith and commitment to take wealth lightly. It can only be done with the help of God.

From this we can see that a homosexual orientation is only a small part of a consecrated life. For a consecrated life, a homosexual orientation is like the hair on our body, which will accompany us for a lifetime. It needs to be taken care of but requires not too much attention. A true consecrated life needs a special kind of martyrdom.

After overcoming the three mountains, one will obtain the three magic weapons, laying the foundation for sanctification, because "this is the will of God, your sanctification" (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

St Augustine[3] stated in his sermon 'On Pastors' that "the seminary is not a refuge from the many limits or psychological deficiencies that one has, nor a place to find protection because one has no courage to move forward in life." I chose to live a consecrated life and I still have a long way to go.

Our Lady, Mother of Vocations, Pray for us!

[3] St Augustine (354-430) is one of the greatest theologians of the Christian Church. His writings are prolific and comprehensive. Many of his theological ideas have influenced the Church to this day, and many of his books are still widely circulated today, such as *The Confessions*, *The City of God*, etc., He is known as 'the first modern man'.

The God of Difference: Towards a Catholic Theology of Homosexuality

Cai Qi

Editor's note: This article by Cai Qi summarises Alain Thomasset's commentary on Xavier Thévenot's article, and asks readers about 'otherness', referring not only to homosexuals but also heterosexuals. Human civilisation has always developed in the process of 'isolation-conflict-reconciliation'. The Chinese character for 'nation' (国) illustrates the problem: barricading its jade, keeping others away. Then there is war and reconciliation. The isolation in the gay community is also very real. As believers in God, the love we receive freely from God needs to be given away freely to others. This requires us to overcome our own biases and learn to embrace differences. Pope Benedict XVI also emphasised in the encyclical 'Deus Caritas Est' (God is Love) that love is "an ongoing exodus out of the closed inward-looking self towards its liberation through self-giving, and thus towards authentic self-discovery." Gay Catholics therefore have a dual need to overcome their closed inward-looking self on a spiritual level. Individuals are vastly different from each other, and the stories and thoughts in this book can probably provide some answers to Thévenot's concerns. On the issue of 'church-homosexuals', I pray that a reconciliation will come as soon as possible, but this requires both parties to reach out to the other and to speak with faith in God.

The tension between homosexuality and Christianity is not only far from being resolved—and in fact it is not even easily discussed—because each side has its own position that is hard to shift. A homosexual Christian is often seen as hypocritical by the one side, while seen as oppressed by the other side. The Church has traditionally rejected homosexuality for three main reasons: firstly, homosexuality is condemned in Biblical

texts; secondly, according to natural law, homosexual acts are anti-natural behaviour; thirdly, in view of the universal mission of mankind, homosexuality violates the purpose of marriage. Regarding these reasons, we can neither ignore the richness and complexity of human nature and forcefully impose our creeds on other people, nor can we ignore the deep meaning of dogmas and indiscriminately accept every existing phenomenon, because both approaches are lazy and insincere.

Many contemporary theologians realise that on this issue, rather than urgently seeking a consensus, it may be more important to ask, what kind of perspective should we take when looking at the relationship between homosexuality and Christianity? Here, the author has chosen a section from the book *Interpréter et agir: Jalons pour une éthique chrétienne* (*Interpretation and Action: An Outline of Christian Ethics*)[1] written by the famous contemporary Jesuit moral theologian, Alain Thomasset. It is a brief review of the article, 'Les homosexualités. Eléments de réflexion éthique (Homosexuality: Elements of Ethical Reflection)',[2] published by theologian Xavier Thévenot in 1983. The original text by Thévenot is very long. Thomasset highlighted some of the main points and used those as examples to illustrate how the principles of hermeneutics should be applied to the analysis of Christian ethical life nowadays. While Thévenot focused on methodology rather than on the issue of homosexuality itself, Thomasset reminds us that Thévenot founded a "theological-anthropological" perspective, and the ideas and methods he applied were very constructive.

To understand Thévenot's thoughts, the first thing to understand is that the author does not intend to make moral judgments on homosexuality, but to point out its limitations in the survival of faith. No matter whether we agree or disagree with his opinion, there is no need to reply with a hasty emotional response. In fact, we need to distinguish between two concepts: limitations do not necessarily imply immorality. If a person, due to subjective or objective reasons, decides not to engage

---

1 Alain Thomasset, *Interpréter et agir. Jalons pour une éthique chrétienne*, (Paris: Cerf, 2011): 80-3.

2 Xavier Thévenot, 'Les homosexualités. Elements de réflexion éthique', *Etudes*, March 1983.

in romantic relationships, not to get married, not to bear children, it would be due to the limitations of their existence. More generally speaking, if a person does not make good use of what they receive from God to develop their own rationality and spirit, to construct, to create, to achieve the best they are capable of, then such a life also has limitations. However, being such ordinary mortal beings is not immoral. Morality lies on another level. In fact the foundation of morality, in layman's terms, is to treat others as free, independent and dignified human beings having complete equality with oneself, and to treat them the best one can. In the two 'greatest commandments' of "love the Lord your God" and "love your neighbour as yourself," Jesus once said that the principle of loving others was to "do to others as you would have them do to you." This commandment, if everyone can carefully and unselfishly examine the real needs of one's inner mind, will not lead into the trap of 'treating others according to my own tastes'.

The Bible and ethics

Today's hermeneutics has reached a consensus that the same-sex sexual behaviour reprimanded in the Bible is fundamentally different from the homosexual relationships we are discussing nowadays. So, why was homosexual behaviour condemned by the Bible? The answer is far from self-evident. Thévenot summarised several pieces from the Bible that directly involved homosexuality.

Firstly, there is the account of Sodom's punishment (Genesis 19: 1-28). But it "is not very useful for speaking of homosexuality because the focus of the account is on the refusal of hospitality more than on the unusual sexual practice. On the other hand, if there is a sexual practice, it is a rape, which has nothing in common with a homosexual practice full of tenderness within a couple."[3] Secondly, the law in the Old Testament states, "You must not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination" (Leviticus 18:20). But Thévenot clearly denied that it was a moral judgement, because the holiness discussed in Leviticus was about a spiritual order which must be observed in the relationship between

[3] Thomasset, *Interpréter et agi*.

men and God and in the order of creation. Here, the "defilement" of man refers to what men owe God, not necessarily any acts that would be detestable according to current standards. It is like when a man admits his sinfulness, foulness, limitations and insignificance before God: that does not mean that he is indeed a wicked, corrupt person in society. Thirdly, in Paul's letters, homosexual behaviour was many times stated to be dishonourable or "contrary to nature" (for example: 1 Corinthians 6:9-10, 1 Timothy 1: 9-11, Romans 1:26-27, etc.), but from the overall context, it can be seen that Paul was reflecting on idolatry, rather than a direct question of individual homosexuality... Idol worship is wrong. Worshipping a creature in place of God and assuming one can do without God, is an evil that will manifest itself as a disorder in sexual relationships.[4]

In *Christian Ethics* (1985), the author Karl H Peschke, a priest of the Society of the Divine Word as well as a German moral theologian, also acknowledged that the traditional understanding of the punishment received by Sodom and Gomorrah being God's punishment of homosexuality is not correct, because the sins of the two cities consisted mainly in rape and the violation of hospitality, which were a direct trampling on love. However, Peschke insisted that the rejection of homosexual behaviour in Leviticus and Romans was clear, but could not be generalised as a critique of a disordered relationship. Cautiously speaking, as to the question of whether the issue raised by Paul is the same thing as modern-day homosexuality, there is not a simple answer of 'yes' or 'no'.[5]

Although there are differences in perspective and method, the above two theologians share a basically identical opinion in one aspect: for any individual, his sexuality does not constitute a right or wrong model of morality. The moral implication of a sexual relationship must be clarified in another way: whether in heterosexuality or homosexuality, chastity is undoubtedly important, but the first priority of Christian virtue is love, not setting norms for sexual behaviour. Therefore, the evaluation

4 Ibid.

5 Karl H Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, translated by Jing Ye, Chang Hong, et al. (Shanghai: East China Normal University Press, 2010): 487-8.

of homosexuality, whether positive or negative, needs to be established from a wider vision, from the role of humans in God's creation. In turn, the reality of homosexuality also presents demands and challenges in the field of anthropology.

The meaning of marriage

The second question is whether homosexuality violates the nature and purpose of marriage. This issue needs to be addressed from two perspectives. On the one hand, in society, with the conceptual change in marriage, modern marriage is based on the free consent of two adults, regardless of whether they wish to raise children, and also has nothing to do with the approval of their family elders. Therefore, it is hard to find a reasonable argument for not recognising same-sex couples, because in this modern view of marriage, whether the parties involved are heterosexual or homosexual, it does not necessarily lead to any change in the nature of marriage. On the other hand, the Church tradition still insists that procreation, even if it is not the sole purpose of marriage, remains the primary purpose. A heterosexual couple that is not willing to have children cannot have a sacramental marriage. Therefore, same-sex marriage is not possible. As Peschke believed, treating homosexuality equally is equivalent to violating an important moral principle: procreation is the purpose of human life.[6] However, in this sense, not only homosexuals, but anyone who is fertile but does not marry and have children, regardless of his or her reasons (focusing on career development, being too finicky, voluntarily staying single, etc.), is violating this essential moral principle. We know that many homosexuals are not unwilling to have children, but the conflict between the need for fertility and their principles of living cannot be related. This situation is similar to a heterosexual who knows that his/her partner is infertile but still chooses to spend the rest of his/her life with her/him, rather than finding another person to marry and bear children. Therefore, the dilemma we face is whether to condemn equally all those who can marry but choose not to and choose not to have children, or to leave out this

[6] Ibid., 486.

moral aspect in reassessing the issue of homosexuality.

Sex and human nature

How should we interpret the expression "contrary to nature" present in the Bible? In the *Summa Theologica*, masturbation, bestiality and homosexuality are all grouped together in "unnatural vice," which is contrary to "the natural order of the venereal act."[7] In 1975, the Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith published its 'Declaration on Certain Questions Concerning Sexual Ethics' which states that "according to the objective moral order, homosexual relations are acts which lack an essential and indispensable finality," and are thus a violation of the dual purpose of sex: procreation and the expression and deepening of love within a married couple. Peschke believed that same-sex sexual behaviour cannot express the sort of love that exists in heterosexual couples. It does not matter how homosexuals affirm the feelings between them, they cannot offer the possibility of completing and perfecting each other that arises from the differences between sexes. He further asserts that past history has shown that sexual experience among homosexuals must be awkward, inadequate, frustrating and oppressive.

The empirical reasoning of Peschke was obviously subjective and biased, and may have reversed the cause-and-effect relationship. It failed to gain support from most people. But how should we interpret this "unnatural vice"? Should we interpret the words of St Thomas and the so-called idea of "contrary to nature" in Romans from the same perspective? It is impossible to develop a complete theological conception in this paper, but we can understand that the criterion for the morality of homosexuality depends on whether it is considered a type of 'natural order' in public opinion. People who oppose homosexuality believe that homosexuality is a violation of human nature, so that it is sinful and needs rehabilitation. On the other hand, people who support it believe that there is biological evidence in favour of homosexuality being a part of human nature and that homosexuality has reasons for existing and

7 Thomasset, *Interpréter et agi*, 189.

cannot be "cured."[8]

However, these two contradictory views are both trapped in the same way, by regarding moral value as a rigid and established existence. For Thomasset, this is a type of "naturalistic danger." In another part of his publication that was cited above, he suggested that one should reflect on the meaning of the word 'nature'. 'Natural' and 'artificial' are not a pair of antonyms. People are not passively surrendering to natural law as if it was the laws of physics, because the concept of nature expresses the complex integrity of the reality of human nature, including the relationships between individuals, between humans and other creations and between humans and God, as well as the potential to be realised through these relationships.[9] Returning to what was discussed above, in the field of sexuality, sexual orientation on its own cannot form a moral norm. Neither homosexual nor heterosexual behaviour is inherently morally right or wrong.

Thomasset uses a metaphor to illustrate human nature, morality and the purpose of living. He believes that a moral actor is not moral only through his nature, but also through his relationship with his own nature and with other realities of the world, just like a sculptor who is trying to realise a beautiful artwork. He understands the strength and fragility of the sculptural material—that is, his nature. He considers the requirements of working with this material and works carefully with respect to reality, making it a truly unique artwork, and dedicating himself to the beauty of life. This is a dialectical process, with both control and abandonment to reality, both creation and obedience. The moral subject is both obedient and responsible.[10]

---

8 Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, 488-9.

9 Thomasset, *Interpréter et agi*, 190-191. In moral theology, we have 'sins against nature' and 'sins according to nature.' This means we cannot judge whether something is good or evil by determining if it is natural or not. In scholastic theology, the measure of good and evil is 'Natural law' rather than 'nature.' These two concepts are different. Nature is not equivalent to Natural law, because there cannot be 'sins according to Natural law.'

10 Ibid., 191-192.

Sexual otherness: A portrait of divine otherness

Considering the inadequacy of the traditional critique of homosexuality, we end up with the question of whether homosexuals cannot "offer the possibility of completing and perfecting each other that arises from the differences between sexes."[11] This is the aforementioned 'limit of survival'.

So what perspective did Thévenot adopt in discussing this issue? From a Biblical anthropological perspective, he pointed out that humans are created as gender-differentiated beings. This is not only a reality but also a mission. Humans need the opposite sex to recognise the reality of their being humans, and in the relationship with the opposite sex, they can search for possibilities to develop themselves and achieve something great.

In Thomasset's review, we can see that denying the moral critique of homosexuality and raising the issue of gender differences on a theological-anthropological level creates a two-pronged approach. The significance of sexual otherness, as mentioned above, far exceeds the needs of procreation. Whether or not a person gets married and has a child, he/she is called to recognise and express him/herself in a relationship with the opposite sex. The expression 'sexual orientation' adequately conveys the sense of 'direction of existence'—sexual orientation not only refers to a sexual interest in the same sex or the opposite sex, but also contains a concern for human survival. Simply put, is a person sincerely interested in and open to 'a person who is different from me'? Or, does he/she only tend to accept and love things the same as him/herself, thus locking him/herself into repetitiveness?

This theme in French theology is closely related to the focus on otherness in French contemporary philosophy, but at the same time, the thought on 'otherness' in philosophy was also shaped by the Biblical tradition.

The Bible affirms that: since the beginning of creation, God created humans in his own image. Specifically, he created a man and a woman. The man was created first, but in the eyes of God, Adam's loneliness was not good. There must be a woman who complements the man

[11] Peschke, *Christian Ethics*, 488.

and becomes one with him. The man and woman jointly reflect the portrait of God. However, God has no sex. The Father and the Holy Spirit are pure spiritual entities, and the angels are like them. When the Son descended to become a human being as Jesus Christ, he took the form of a human male. But as the only Son of the Father, his divinity is not limited by sexual difference. As a human, one must exist as a man or a woman. An abstract existence that transcends sex is only a myth introduced by the idea of mind-body dualism. So what is the significance of God creating sexual differences? Is the combination of men and women just for the needs of procreation? Although procreation is indeed the primary purpose of the union of the two sexes, let us look at this vast, great world. God also created many creatures that are parthenogenetic or self-propagating. If the purpose was solely to procreate, the union of two different sexes was not the only way to do that. There are simpler and safer ways to produce offspring that would enable the human species to continue. So there must be a greater purpose beyond simply procreation behind God's plan of having two people with different sexes fall in love, get married, give birth and raise children together.

Thévenot summed up this purpose as the relationship between "sexual otherness" and "divine otherness":

> Recognition of divine otherness as a creative origin that escapes the control of the human being and recognition of sexual otherness go hand in hand. It is the refusal of confusion, of total mastery, of immediacy (the order of the imaginary according to Jacques Lacan). It is therefore to be expected that homosexuality as a plenary and existential non-recognition of sexual difference will be perceived by Biblical authors in its link with the non-recognition of the Creator and the order of creation.[12]

Thévenot emphasised that the Bible always rebuked homosexuality in the context of idolatry. Idolatry can lead to disorders in sexual relationships. Humans must know God, which means knowing that God is God, not an idol. Idols are the fruit of our imagination. They are replicas of ourselves,

[12] Thomasset, *Interpréter et agi*.

while God is the absolutely transcendent and distinct being beyond us. Our relationship with idols is the projection of our own desires. However, our relationship with God is always full of the amazement, trepidation and wonder that His revelation brings us. Nevertheless, how can one understand that God is the absolutely different being? Much of our understanding of God is reached by using analogies. When we speak of God as the 'Father', the experience we have with our own father leads us to a desire for God, the perfect, all-powerful, infinitely loving Father. Similarly, the experience we have with a 'different person' makes us realise our own limitations and the value of others, so that we can learn to approach and listen to others with respect and curiosity. This kind of life experience is the analogy that helps us to recognise the otherness and transcendence of God. Even though there are many differences between individuals, the sexual difference is undoubtedly the most fundamental. When in front of the opposite sex, one realises that he/she ultimately has his/her boundaries, which requires one to take an important step in denying oneself and trusting others. It is in this sense that the dissimilarity between sexes becomes a symbol of the otherness between God and humans.

Without attention to otherness, there would be no recognition of otherness, thus leading to lack of respect for people other than oneself. Then people would show two tendencies: indifference to others, or oppression of others. In other words, one would forcefully assimilate others or turn them into tools under one's control. The manifestation in the field of religion is that people either become atheists (being indifferent and isolated) or become idolaters (misusing God's name). Attitudes corresponding to atheism and idolatry in interpersonal relationships, are indifference towards others (in narcissism) and hatred of others, the exploitation and oppression of others (male chauvinism, extreme feminism, people exploiting marriage for their own benefits, etc.).

What needs to be reiterated is that the focus here is not morality. Although some unethical behaviours are listed above, these behaviours are not exclusive to homosexuality, nor are they necessarily caused by homosexuality. In heterosexuality, severe distortions of humanity can also occur in the case where one is exploiting the opposite sex as a

tool for self-satisfaction. What Thévenot tried to point out is that the distortion of heterosexual relationships is related to other factors rather than sexual orientation, while sexual orientation of the homosexual does contain the root of the avoidance of others. This is why he was determined not to classify homosexuality as a moral disorder, but at the same time he pointed out the limitations of homosexuality to survive. Homosexual relationships cannot realise the purpose of heterosexual relationships, and this purpose, according to the plan of God's creation, is not something that one can choose, but one is called to realise.

A person must be born with a sex. This sex attribute is both an inexhaustible essence and a limiting challenge. Just like what Thomasset said about "sculpting material," sex gives us openness and a mission of being human at the same time. For Jesus Christ who became incarnate as a man, we may neglect his appearance and lineage, but we cannot avoid talking about his sex. Our feelings about the flesh-and-blood Son must take account of this fact, which cannot be regarded as a superficial detail. One of the most basic facts of his incarnation is that the Son was not born as a woman, but was born of a woman. It was not to assert the superiority of men over women, but to clarify the mission and relationship between the two sexes. Whether the question is human survival or mission, coordination and unity are required between men and women. Jesus Christ came from God, was formed in a woman and manifested himself as a man. There is a limit to unity between the opposite sexes. Sex is never just sex. It is a type of intimacy. It is a transcendence completed in the dual process of self-liberation and negation. It is not just a matter of self-satisfaction, but only in such a relational activity can one strongly understand that one needs another person, and this 'other person' needs someone to call for, trust and respond to. Whether this person is a man or a woman, he/she can neither be manipulated nor assimilated. It is this astonishing nature of otherness that brings happiness, and one can paradoxically experience completeness despite one's own incompleteness. In this sense, sex cannot be a self-repetition or self-proliferation. This is why a sexual experience without love can only leave one with emptiness and irritability, because it is merely an attempt to achieve completeness by manipulating oneself or others, and it will ultimately fail.

Two-way diversity

In God's creation plan, the two sexes with differences are each other's 'other'. They can complete each other in a type of tension. For both men and women, the qualities that the opposite sex presents and its demands make them aware of their own limitations as human and of the flaws in their own existing ideas. However, in the whole society, the rights of homosexuals are claimed under the banner of accepting the 'other' and accepting diversity. In traditional society, the homosexuals, transgender persons, transvestites, etc., that are present, appear as the 'other' challenging the existing ideology of that society, and also, to some extent, inciting people to reflect on the roles allotted to men and women by cultural traditions and to ask whether these roles are compatible with human nature. For example, people are accustomed to thinking that women should be sensitive while men should be rational; boys should play with electronic toys, while girls should play with Barbie dolls; men must be brave and strong, while women should be weak and obedient, and so on. Undoubtedly, with differences between the two sexes, each gender has some universal essential characteristics that distinguish it from the other gender. However, the question is whether these universalities can be imposed on each individual as a label, thus negating the right to have individual differences? Joan of Arc's short hair and her men's clothing were some of the reasons that led her to be accused of heresy.

This article wants to point out that the existence of homosexual relationships functions as 'otherness' towards the whole of society, just as the existence of two sexes acts as the 'otherness' in each individual's life. The acceptance and acknowledgement of homosexuality by society and the acceptance and acknowledgement of heterosexuality by homosexuals must be mutual and simultaneous. Otherwise, a unilateral diversification will lead in reality to dictatorship. Here is an example that may not be entirely appropriate: in many European countries, some Islamic immigrant groups demand, on the grounds of diversity, that European society accept their customs. But within these groups, it is doubtful whether they allow diversification or the existence of otherness. So some groups, while demanding tolerance from the outside world, so

they can be respected and empowered as representing a social 'otherness', are completely rigid, homogeneous and violent within. Such situations allow us to understand the reflection of contemporary moral theologians: diversity always exists at different levels—the global level, the social level, the community level, and even the individual level: 'being other to oneself' is exactly what it means. Whether it is for a social community or for a human individual, if there is no 'otherness', one cannot recognise and understand oneself. This is probably the worry of theologians like Thévenot: does living in same-sex pairs make people shut themselves off? Will it lead to people forgetting their own limitations and one-sidedness in a state of mutual satisfaction, so that they cannot understand and communicate with the needs of the opposite sex at the level of the entire human species?

Conclusion

Simone de Beauvoir famously once said, "one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one." She called women "the second sex," meaning that women are defined by men. This slogan became the centre of the feminist movement. In the history of the oppression of women, this kind of understanding is very important, because in the old ideology, being 'female' meant being in chains. However, getting rid of the oppression of women does not mean, in any way, erasing the existence of both sexes, but on the contrary, it leads to understanding the true difference between the sexes given by God and its significance. This difference is not a framework that is imposed on us by a feudal society or by a certain kind of culture, but the desire for 'otherness' planted in our hearts by God. In this desire, both men and women experience love while they realise their finiteness. By admitting that I am only a man or a woman, I become capable of opening up and loving others at the same time, enriching my own existence while loving others. And while enriching myself, I become conscious of my own uniqueness. Otherness is a kind of gravitation, a mission that unites the love for others and the love of God. Because the other sex is incomprehensible and uncontrollable to me, it requires me to give it love, dignity, communication and service to help us reach God, the absolutely Other being.

How should the modern Church understand homosexuality? How should homosexual Christians understand theological reflections on homosexuality? This article cannot give a definite answer, but can only try to introduce a perspective from contemporary theology. This view also presents the possible meanings and limitations of the existence of homosexuality. Whether to accept this perspective or to reject it, is a question for homosexuals themselves. Being a homosexual is not something to be blessed or cursed, but to be clarified. To clarify oneself before the world is also the responsibility of every surviving being.

Appendix: The Bible and Homosexuality according to Xavier Thévenot

Alain Thomasset, *Interpréter et agir. Jalons pour une éthique chrétienne* [Interpretation and Action: An Outline of Christian Ethics] (Paris: Cerf, 2011), 80-83. This section is a brief review of the article by Xavier Thévenot, 'Les homosexualités. Eléments de réflexion éthique' ('Elements of Ethical Reflection on Homosexuality'), *Etudes*, March 1983.

Concerning one of the most controversial issues in today's morality, that of homosexuality, what can the Bible teach us? The nuanced position of Xavier Thévenot is worth examining. Let us first note that a certain number of Biblical passages seem to speak directly of homosexuality. A number of these passages have moreover often been used as proof-texts throughout Church tradition. But before looking at these passages, which deserve special attention, it is necessary to remember the aim of the Biblical authors. They do not seek to elaborate treatises on sexuality. Rather, they ask themselves how the realities of this world fit into the Lord's covenantal plan.

A theological reflection on the status of sexuality

"Sexuality (and with it homosexuality) will not be submitted in the Bible to phenomenological research, but to theological reflection. The Biblical authors are interested in questions such as: What is the relationship between the exercise of sexuality and the encounter with God? In what way does this or that way of living sexuality serve or undermine the

glory of God? Is there a link between deviations from the relationship with God and deviations from the relationship with the other sex? etc. It is understandable that it is not relevant to look for Biblical thought on homosexuality only in the passages that speak of homosexual acts. The latter will indeed be grasped within the wider horizon of the Creator's plan of salvation, and notably of the place of sexuality in this plan. This is why it is important, as indeed the New Testament itself does, to return to the theological convictions that emerge from an examination of the creation narratives in Genesis, both of which culminate in the creation of sexual difference."[13]

The creation narratives affirm the goodness of sexuality before original sin and state that "the constructive recognition of sexual otherness is linked to the recognition of the creature's position marked by prohibition, desire and finitude." In Genesis 2-3, as soon as these differences are flouted, a disturbance in the relationship between the sexes arises. For the narrative, recognition of divine otherness as a creative origin beyond human control and recognition of sexual otherness, therefore go hand in hand. It is the refusal of confusion, of total mastery, of immediacy (the order of the imaginary according to Jacques Lacan). It is therefore to be expected that homosexuality as a plenary and existential non-recognition of sexual difference will be perceived by Biblical authors in its link with the non-recognition of the Creator and the order of creation.

A few passages confirm this view. 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 and 1 Timothy 1:9-11 speak of *malakoi* (depraved) and *arsenokoitai* (infamous), but their translation is not clear enough to be sure that they are speaking of homosexuality. Likewise, the story of Sodom (Genesis 19:1-28) is not very useful for speaking of homosexuality because the focus of the account is on the refusal of hospitality more than on the unusual sexual practice. On the other hand, if there is a sexual practice, it is a rape, which has nothing in common with a homosexual practice full of tenderness within a couple.

If we keep only the passages which the Bible experts unanimously

[13] Thévenot, 'Les homosexualités', 348-9.

agree on, there remain only Leviticus 18:22 and 20:13 and Romans l:26-27. Chapters 18 and 20 of Leviticus certainly speak of homosexuality. *Thou shalt not lie with a man as one lies with a woman. It is an abomination*. These texts are part of the code of sanctity, however this sanctity, for Leviticus, is not of a moral order, but consists in living in accordance with the order of Creation. Sexual difference is part of it and to question this difference is to become an accomplice to the forces of chaos that still threaten the world. Chaos is akin to non-differentiation and therefore to idolatry, which is the rejection of the difference between man and God.

The Epistle to the Romans, on the other hand, attacks paganism. The pagans are inexcusable since, knowing God, they traded the glory of God for idols. Thus God gave them over to debasing passions. "For their wives traded natural relations for unnatural relations. In the same way men... burned with desire for one another" (Romans 1:26-27). We must remember that Paul is reflecting here on the problem of idolatry and not directly on the specific problem of homosexuality. The refusal of the Creator inevitably results in the degradation of the body (1:24). Paul, following the Hellenistic Jewish tradition, affirms that the idolatrous inversion which claims to do without the Creator by making the creature a god, is translated by sexual inversion.

What do we get out of all this? First, says Thévenot, the conviction that it is illegitimate to say, as McNeill does, that "homosexuality is part of God's plan." It is the opposite idea that comes through: homosexual practice is always perceived as a disorder in Creation. The Biblical message cannot be used to say that it is a simple variant of sexuality—moreover a variant aimed at introducing otherness into sexuality and therefore to be valued as such! On the other hand, it is true that Scripture always speaks of homosexuality in a context of idolatry. However, obviously, the vast majority of contemporary homosexuals do not live their sexual acts as idolatrous acts. On the contrary, some Christian homosexuals feel that their condition as homosexuals has contributed to bringing them closer to God. This raises difficult but true questions for these people who, having a homosexual structure and considering themselves incapable of being continent, wonder whether the tenderness they express in their sexual relationship should be considered immoral?

And if the God of compassion who came for the excluded could condemn them to a life of misfortune?

Without going into the details of the pastoral advice which the author then gives, which distinguishes in particular between acts and persons, he confirms the fact that the classical Catholic position does not seem, in substance, to need to be questioned. But it is useful to see that his argumentation is based both on an anthropological approach (inspired by Freudian psychoanalysis) and on Biblical theological research.

"Both contemporary anthropology and Biblical anthropology remind us that the movement of humanisation is a movement of differentiation, an articulation, always to be renewed, between the other and the same. And this movement must take account of sexual difference, at the very least, to the same extent as all other differences. Therefore, any sexual conduct seems to me non-normative if it is built on an excessive denial of the movement of differentiation."[14]

The author's analysis thus rejects the use of isolated Biblical quotations to condemn homosexuality insofar as these quotations have little meaning in the present-day context. On the other hand, a broader reflection of Biblical anthropology on the fundamental differentiation of man and woman, on the principle of Creation, and framed within in a Biblical theology of the Covenant between God and man, leads us to consider sexual difference as intrinsic to the movement of humanisation and its denial in typical homosexual behaviour "as an objective psycho-sexual limit whose appearance we must try to prevent."

[14] Ibid., 352.

How LGBTQI+ Catholic Groups Contribute to the Church

Eros Shaw

The documentary *Owning Our Faith* talks about gay Catholics, and was first shown on the internet in 2015. A pair of gay couples interviewed said, "If we leave the Church and give her up, the Church will never be able to make a change. So we must stay in the Church. We have to be an example and encourage others to be examples, too. For these examples are the energy that allows the Church to make a change."

But this change can also be understood as a renewal. Many of us have forgotten that the Catholic Church was a pioneer in the most radical revolutions of self-improvement and social improvement. We will not leave the Mother Church, as Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the message of eternal life." We need to help the Church renew itself and, in God's way, let more people embrace this Mother as did the saints and their collaborators throughout all the ages (in the lists of saints, the best known include St Augustine, St Benedict,[1] St Francis, St Ignatius[2] and St Mother Teresa of Calcutta[3]). We stay in the Church to help it most fittingly in creating what St Augustine described: *The City*

---

1 St Benedict, 480-547, was the founder in Italy of Western monasticism and the Benedictine Order. The *Rule of St Benedict* attributed to him had an enormous impact on future generations of monks. The Order of Saint Benedict played an important role in preserving medieval European civilisation.

2 St Ignatius, 1491-1556, a Spaniard and the founder of the Society of Jesus. The Society played an important role in supporting the Pope's policy during the Reformation.

3 St Mother Teresa, 1910-1997, dubbed the 'Angel of Calcutta' among Chinese-speaking Christians. She was the founder of the Missionaries of Charity, and laureate of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1979.

of God in the Earthly City.

Regarding issues on slavery, racism, the caste system, women's rights, discrimination towards AIDS and Hepatitis B patients, freedom of religion, labour welfare, migrants, refugees and child labour, the Church and her organisations have participated, are participating and will continue to participate in the fight for human rights. The progress of human rights is the victory of God. Regarding the rights of the LGBTQI+ community, the Church will one day come to share that victory universally and collectively.

A platform for dialogue

There is a global population of 7.95 billion people, and China's population is 1.45 billion.[4] Sociologists put the number of homosexuals at a minimum of two percent (another estimation at four percent). According to this ratio, the gay population worldwide is approximately 159 million, with 29 million gay Chinese.

Meanwhile, the *Annuario Pontificio* 2022 has put the number of Catholics worldwide at 1.36 billion. According to the statistics provided by the Holy Spirit Study Centre, there were 10.5 million Catholics in China by the end of 2016. If we take two percent as the ratio, there are 27.2 million gay Catholics worldwide and 200,000 gay Catholics in China.

One hundred-and-fifty nine million, 29 million, 27.2 million and 200,000. How shocking these data are. Many people must think them incredible. This huge group of LGBTQI+ people, however, remains only as data in some people's minds, instead of a group of persons of flesh and blood with emotions, persons who might be present in your family or mine.

Fear and indifference hinder the exchange between the Church and the LGBTQI+ community. Those gay Catholics are left feeling pain, and it also hurts the catholicity of the Church. The Church cannot neglect the 27.2 million and the 200,000. Gay Catholic groups therefore have taken up their role as a platform for dialogue. The first thing these groups have

[4] Figures taken from https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/

to do is to build a bridge of dialogue between the Church and its gay members. This has to be done so that gay Catholics can live a better life of faith, and that the message of mercy of the Church can be passed on.

Moreover, mainstream media tends to regard the Catholic Church as an enemy of LGBTQI+ issues. Some comments from Church officials have created waves of uproar. For example, late Bishop Michael Yeung Ming-cheung once compared homosexuals to drug addicts, and Fr Augustine Tsang Hing-to of Fu Jen Catholic University claimed that they are people with a congenital tendency to lie and steal. One of the tasks we have been undertaking in recent years is to resolve this misunderstanding. It is a pity, though, that no one has paid attention to our work, which is done in a similar manner to the way apologetics was done in the early Church. We safeguard the image of the Church among non-Christian LGBTQI+ groups, NGOs and the general public. This makes us disregarded by both sides. We cannot stop doing this work, however, as this is one of the natural missions of a gay Catholic community.

A channel for ecumenism

As the number of gay Protestants is much greater than that of gay Catholics, it becomes easier for gay Christians to live up to the spirit of ecumenism when they share the common identity of being homosexual. A Jesuit once said to me, "Your fellowship is possibly the largest ecumenical group in the mainland." What he should have said was "the largest gay Christian fellowship."

When the China Rainbow Witness Fellowship was established in 2009 with me as the only Catholic member, the fellowship started up as an ecumenical effort from its very beginning. In fact, all the gay fellowships across the country include Christians from various denominations. There have also been Orthodox Christians joining us. As far as I know, the leaders of these fellowships understand and live up to the spirit of ecumenism as all the members share the identity of being gay.[5] These fellowships support and help each other and become a good

[5] A group of gay Christians in Shenzhen once had a conversation about Rome's status

example of ecumenical cooperation.

After a retreat held for gay Christians in Shanghai one year,[6] over 50 of them prayed at the Stations of the Cross at the pilgrimage site in Sheshan. Most of them were Protestants. This should have been counted as a grace for the ecumenical effort.

Cooperation on charity work

Due to a misunderstanding, AIDS was widely seen as a gay disease during the last two decades of the twentieth century. And people even said AIDS was a punishment from above for homosexuals. Advanced technology today helps to overcome that false idea. But in many countries, same-sex couples enjoy no right to marriage. Even when gay people have a right to sexual activities, the gay community has been labelled as a high-risk group for AIDS mainly because of anal intercourse among gay men.

As a gesture to show concern for the health (and well-being) of our fellow gays, and to dispel misunderstanding, almost all gay rights groups took an active part in AIDS-prevention campaigns. Among these groups, those affiliated with the Church were particularly active. In the United States, for example, groups including New Ways Ministry,[7] Dignity[8] and the Metropolitan Community Church played an active role even before the AIDS epidemic spread. In China, two church organisations in Shenyang have been involved in AIDS prevention for 10 years. Some

---

in the early Church. Joe, a Protestant, said, "Siblings in a family come one by one and therefore we have an older brother and a younger brother. We all join together. It is of utmost importance for the whole family to stay together." He continued, "In my family, my dad and his eldest, fifth and sixth brothers all wanted to take the initiative to run our family. However, the brothers always fought with each other. Therefore, the eldest or the one who takes the lead should learn to sacrifice, offer, and be courteous." This simple yet sophisticated wisdom made me feel amazed and thankful.

6 退修 is a Chinese term commonly used by Protestant Christians. It means 'retreat' and the Catholic equivalent is 避靜. It is a practice that imitates Jesus' retreat to the desert for prayers, with the aim of strengthening the relationship with God the Father.

7 See http://newwaysministry.org/NWM/HIV-AIDS%20Retreat.pdf

8 Founded by Fr Pat Nidorf, a gay Catholic group called the Rap Group has gradually developed since 1969. It is now one of the largest gay Catholic organisations in the United States.

members of our fellowship also have experience as volunteers with NGOs that fight against AIDS.

In the fight against AIDS, unity is essential when you want to win. This is the central idea of the letter Pope Francis sent to the 8th Conference on HIV Pathogenesis, Treatment and Prevention. The Catholic Church has made great efforts in this area. Among the medical organisations assisting AIDS patients, those belong to the Catholic Church account for more than 25 percent. In countries battling with AIDS, the Catholic Church is always at the forefront.[9]

Many gay patients suffering from AIDS were ashamed to talk with other people. As a bridge between homosexuals and the Church, gay Catholic groups not only bring together the Church and the AIDS patients but also serve to connect AIDS-prevention organisations targeting homosexuals with those organisations with a Church background.

Talent and specialty

The Filipino Church is a role model for the Catholic Church in Asia. Those who have lived in the Philippines come to know that the Catholic Church is a church for the poor, the suffering and those on the periphery. From my gaydar (radar of the gay community, if there really is such a thing), I could sense that the young members who are obviously gay are indeed the main forces of service to the Church. They who assist as altar boys, sing in the choir, organise activities, lead Bible study groups… are all typical soldiers of Christ. The Filipino priests I met would extend their hands to a homosexual's forehead to touch it with the back of their hands, a typical Filipino way of blessing. The priests could not have been ignorant about the person's orientation. There is a large number of cross-dressers and transvestites in Filipino society. They become the major workforce in beauty salons. Once a Dutch priest told me, "When I entered a shop like that, I realised the situation. I told them not to touch my head." Upon listening to the priest's sharing, my respect for him immediately vanished. Yet, my gaydar told me that this

9 *Vatican Radio*, July 25, 2015.

priest looked very much like a homosexual. I truly understand that this is the phenomenon where a deeply closeted gay man can be extremely homophobic. While he was speaking against homosexuals in class, the icon he used was in fact a creation by the gay artist Salvador Dali.

I am definitely not promoting gay elitism. But homosexuals have become icons in many sectors. I don't want to give a long list of names of those iconic figures nor place them beyond dispute. Just think of the chapel where the cardinals gather for a consistory. The famous painting on the ceiling was painted by Michelangelo, another gifted homosexual.

When you see those homosexuals actively serving the Philippine Church and taking part in evangelisation with their talent, it makes you ask whether homosexual persons could not contribute their talents in a broader perspective in the Church?

The final report of the 2014 Bishops' Synod deleted the clause saying that homosexuals had "gifts and qualities to offer to the Christian community." This vaguely hinted to me that a kind of game is taking place in the College of Cardinals and that not everyone in the College is turning a deaf ear and pretending that they do not understand.

A platform for evangelisation

In many classes for catechumens and faith-sharing sessions among young people, the issue of homosexuality is raised, but given a euphemistic answer by priests. When some of those present are homosexuals, it can only bring them clouds of doubt or a hurtful sentiment which hinders them from going deeper into the Church and into their faith.

This is worth reflection. When the Church bases her teaching on the Catechism that stresses the need for respect and care for homosexuals, if that is really being done, why are there so many gay Catholics staying away from the Church and eventually leaving it?

The evangelisation by the Church is multi-directional, aiming at different groups of people. Homosexuals belong to the group that undergoes most criticism. It has been difficult for them to find an environment which is discreet and secure. Therefore, the presence of gay Catholic groups becomes a platform for evangelising homosexuals. And of course, such a special differentiation is not a good option. Only

when the church community in general and a particular diocese fully embrace homosexuals into their ministry or set up corresponding groups canonically, can such differentiation become unnecessary. An example of this is the group LGBT Catholics Westminster in the Diocese of Westminster in England.

Besides using the internet as a platform for communication, China Catholic Rainbow Community also started 'offline activities' in various cities. This bore fruit in the effort for evangelisation. Taking the year 2014–15 as an example, about 20 friends related to the Rainbow Community were baptised. Yet, there is an issue here that we need to deal with. What if their identity became known in the parish?

In China, the best way is to let the parish priest learn about the homosexual group in the parish before he assigns a suitable person to accompany and encourage the gay members (the best solution would be that the priest himself takes up the role). And their identity must be kept secret. While this is the most suitable measure to be taken for the time being, the long-term goal is to allow everyone to live openly in the sunlight.

A witness to spirituality

William James suggested that the secret of human nature was best studied through our religious life.[10] Homosexuality has existed everywhere through the past up to the present, and has been studied extensively in science, sociology, psychology, law and other disciplines. Yet, the religious life of a large number of gay Christians shows an important experience of spiritual life, which is a channel for exploring the secret of human nature.

The gay Christian population then serves as a platform to welcome a wide range of homosexual fellows who have different understandings of their own selves and collect their stories (as this book does) to explore his/her/their deep-hidden secrets. This further leads to an analysis which opens up a new perspective on how they believe, how they praise, how they worship and how they live their spiritual life. It is certainly

[10] William James, 1842-1910, American philosopher and psychologist. One of his masterpieces is *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (宗教经验之种种, 1902).

impossible to separate completely the faith life of heterosexuals from that of homosexuals. Yet, the fact of being homosexual enables homosexuals to look at faith from a special perspective.

Let us think of the experience of Fr Henri Nouwen. His struggle and the way he strived to enrich his spiritual life have been an encouragement to many.

Vocational discernment

I remember a certain article which presented research carried out in the United States. The research found that gay priests were more sensitive and sympathetic to pain and suffering than their heterosexual counterparts, that they could conduct more in-depth conversations with the faithful and therefore were much preferred by parishioners.[11]

We believe that homosexuals can be 'qualified' to become Catholic priests and nuns. From the numerous cases we see, it is an undeniable fact. And during their process of self-understanding, homosexual Christians share a tendency of considering a religious vocation. Among those homosexual faithful I meet, almost all of them mentioned they had considered or are considering a religious vocation.

Catholic celibacy for the priesthood has a certain attractiveness. Religious persons usually enjoy a revered position in laymen's hearts: this helps to explain the attractiveness of a religious vocation. When there is such a high percentage of gay Catholics considering a vocation, the fact of being a homosexual must play a role in that. Firstly, it gives a justification for not marrying; secondly, the pain and humiliation suffered because of being homosexual can be compensated by the prestige a religious person enjoys; and thirdly, there will be no worry about their livelihood when they grow into old age.

---

[11] It is a pity that the original text cannot be retrieved anymore. After organising its first conference, the Chinese Society for Study of Sexual Minorities decided to publish a bi-weekly in Chinese. The article was one of those published in the bi-weekly. Their website http://csssm.aibai.com/framel.htm carries a lot of articles on the topic of homosexuality and religion that are worth reading. I could not find the article, but remembered vaguely that I read it in a journal (桃红满天下) about a gender and sex-orientation conference in North America.

Inside and outside China alike, I have come across individual cases of gay priests breaking their vows of celibacy. They manage to live up to a loosened standard but cannot make up their minds to leave the priesthood, so they become anxious and suffer pain. But this is only a secular consideration. I tried to invite one of these priests to write about his story so it could be included in this book. He refused through his silence. I invited some other priests through different friends and without exception they all declined. These friends who acted as intermediaries reminded the priests that their lives would be ruined if their identity was exposed. I can truly understand their situation and feel empathy for them.

How I wish those 'qualified' priests would stand up, telling the Church that they have not betrayed their vocation and that they are 'qualified' shepherds. Meanwhile, I too wish those gay priests who betrayed their vows would serve as a warning for others. Yet, testimonies of both kinds are lacking in this book.

When gay Catholics go through the process of vocational discernment, their experiences would be different and similar. These experiences would have both general and specific characteristics. Gay Catholic groups share the responsibility of keeping a record of these experiences to provide preliminary information to gay Catholics who share the same thought. This would help them discern their true vocation and, in regard to their homosexual tendency, avoid leading them down a wrong path that would cause regret for their own choice and trouble within the Church. On the other hand, it would help those gay Catholics who genuinely discern their vocation by allowing them to use these different cases as reference points and strengthen them by eliminating fake elements and retaining genuine ones. This would also serve the vocational formation of the Church by providing gay Catholics with reliable information in this regard.

It is worth pointing out that although the issue of homosexuals leading a religious life is no longer taboo, prejudice still exists in the minds of many as to whether they can be good priests. The answer is in the affirmative, but I am not going to touch on this topic. What I want to stress is that, when we put the two percent of gays into the population of bishops, priests and nuns, there must have been a huge number of them

throughout the past and up to the present. We should not have avoided the issue. And this expression is by no means disrespectful. The huge number of homosexual religious persons is also a great treasure of the Church. We should tell their stories in a proper manner, and give hope to those gay Catholics who want to lead a religious life.

A transparent cooperation

When Pope Benedict XVI resigned from his pontificate, an Italian newspaper cited a conspiracy. When the Pope received the secret report of December 17, 2012 from the task force, he became determined to step down. The article quoted a "source person" who had seen the report and said it warned the Vatican that there were senior clergymen who had formed an "alliance based on their sexual orientation" as if there were an underground homosexual organisation. There was even a "gay lobby" outside the Vatican threatening to disclose "the sex life" of these senior clergymen. There are some senior clergymen who face "external influence"—and we can call that blackmail.[12]

Explaining his resignation, the Pope was clear and sincere. We do not need to be influenced by the media. However, the noise about there being a gay group among the clergymen in the Vatican and in Rome has never stopped.[13] There was also a sign showing that a similar network of gay priests existed in mainland China.[14] This phenomenon may seem problematic to the general public. But we need to think about the cause of the problem. Is it not the lack of a comprehensive plan of pastoral care for homosexuals that leads to this opacity?

There is a saying that birds of a feather flock together. From an objective perspective, there is no problem with having gay Catholic groups and gay priests' groups. When people of a kind come together,

---

[12] http://www.chinacath.com/zhuanlan/jiaozongcizhi/gejiefanying/2013-02-25/19765.html

[13] In the book *Pope Benedict XVI: A Biography of Joseph Ratzinger* by John L Allen, there is a section discussing this topic; a Chinese version of the book (教宗本笃十六世) was published by the Taiwanese company Morning Star.

[14] This is what I heard from a gay seminarian. It is up to the reader to assess its reliability. But please do not make any malicious interpretation.

however, the group will inevitably face temptation. This is something I am always thinking about: how can the members of these groups have a positive impact by being good companions, and how can they eliminate the temptation on the negative side?

If those senior clergymen were to come together to form a group, maintaining their clerical vows of celibacy and listening to the Holy Spirit before they reflect on the pastoral plans for gay groups, that would become a true blessing for the Church and for Catholic homosexuals. If they go the opposite way, it will bring harm to all parties.

Nonetheless, in any case, it was like catching the wind and clutching at a shadow when these accusations broke out. A fundamental cause to this is the way the homosexual identity draws public attention in the Church as well as in society as a whole, and the opacity that results from that.

If the gay priests and gay Catholic groups could exist openly in the Vatican and in various dioceses, the truth could then be revealed when there is supervision. Society and the Church would both benefit from such transparency. I can understand that it is very difficult. All I can do is pray.

A merciful self-examination

The draft of the final report submitted after the Third Extraordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 2014, called for greater openness towards homosexuals, and said that homosexuals had gifts and qualities to offer to the Christian community. These sentences, however, were eliminated from the final text.

The final report suggested that the Church should be a place that accepts homosexuals. However, the observable fact is that the Church has objected to the union of homosexual couples, has resisted those international organisations which financially support the legalisation of gender equality, and therefore has not become a place accepting homosexuals. I learned that there are bishops and priests who wanted to show their care for gay Catholics, but they gave up as the pressure from parishioners made it hard for them to proceed.

When the many traditional Catholics heard that their bishops and priests were attending to gay people, none of them would first

take into account the merciful attitude of these bishops and priests. And they failed to understand how many contacts and struggles their pastors had endured before making such a step. These traditional Catholics immediately asked questions like "What if he supports same-sex marriage?" or "Is he objecting to the Church's tradition?" These traditional Catholics are everywhere in and outside China. There's no need to mention that people in China generally share this mindset. An example abroad is the diocese of Westminster. When the diocese started openly to look after homosexuals and transsexuals, debates and negative feedback became incessant.

A priest whom I know very well, who has long been a companion to gay Catholics, said to me, "Although I'm a very traditional person myself, I can truly see from their lives the difficulty they have, as well as the talent they have." This priest has never changed his stance or his understanding of the Church, but in contact and dialogue with gay Catholics, he sincerely and mercifully took care of them, whereas many of those opposed to gay Catholics have never got in touch with their gay counterparts: they have simply adopted a critical mind and caused pain to those gay companions who actually share with them the same faith.

When we celebrated the Jubilee of Mercy and proclaimed our belief in the mercy of Jesus, many of us in fact forgot to share this mercy with others. Maybe they would say, "Can they be Christians like us? We cannot act against the tradition of the Church." Yet, when we look into the eyes of a statue of the Divine Mercy, will Jesus say to me "Your sin is so grievous that I cannot forgive you"? We are all sinners and we all need the mercy of Jesus, and have to treat each other mercifully.

Maybe, as the gay faithful are part of a minority group, they are more capable of understanding others' weaknesses. Gay Catholics are the same, and they can better understand the weaknesses and sins of their fellows.

Eros Shaw's Interview with *Progetto Gionata*

Progetto Gionata: Hi Eros, I want to thank you for the opportunity you are giving to Italian readers to know the Catholic and Chinese perspectives on LGBTQI+ issues, problems and opportunities in the Church.

Eros Shaw: Thank you! I'm very excited to have the chance to exchange ideas with Italian friends through *Progetto Gionata*.

This is your first book. Where did you get the idea to write it? Does it arise from a specific need to fill a gap in the debate on LGBTQI+ issues inside the Church?

There is no doubt that the universal Church (even the churches in Europe and America, not to mention Asia or China, and the churches of other continents) are still seriously lacking an open and clear discussion on LGBTQI+ issues. I hope that this book will help to build a more positive and informed debate on these topics within the Church.

Strictly speaking, this is indeed my first 'official' book, since it has an ISBN number and it is published in Malaysia, but it is not my first book about gay Christians. In 2014, the China Rainbow Witness Fellowship, of which I am a founding member, participated at the Shanghai Pride Festival. At that time we discussed editing a gay Christian handbook in order to let Christians understand LGBTQI+ people and to let LGBTQI+ people know the Christian faith (gay Christians too have a strong commitment to evangelisation). Since we had only limited time, I had to edit the short booklet in just three days, collecting witnesses from friends (mostly Protestants) and theoretical reflections on homosexuality and Christian faith under the title *When We (LGBTQI+) Meet Up With Jesus*. I have to admit that some of the content was a bit 'rough', but the

overall result was very satisfying: we printed 1,000 copies for our friends and for people interested in the book, then printed another 1,000 copies to donate to communities around China. We also prepared an electronic version available to download for free on the internet. Because of the positive reception of the book, I decided in 2015 that it was the right time to edit a new book completely focused on gay Catholics.

I was really amazed by the size and the variety of May Your Lips Kiss Mine*: in 400 pages you offer a wide range of different angles and literary styles, from personal tales, to scientific articles to theological analysis. Could you tell us more about the book's structure and themes?*

The framework and the structure of the book were very clear to me from the very beginning, organised around four major topics: stories, theory, public benefit and literature.

The first section includes not only the stories of mainland Chinese, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwanese and overseas Chinese LGBTQI+ (including gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgender people), but also experiences shared by their straight friends, relatives, their former wives, and even some personal pastoral insights from Catholic priests. The second section, the theoretical one, is a collection of articles from gay Catholic leaders, including some theological debates together with several media releases and information from the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics (GNRC).

It sounds like a very comprehensive work! What about the public interest section?

The public benefit part focuses on the interaction between gay Catholic people and the Church with several witnesses from the LGBTQI+ community and two Catholic HIV prevention groups. In addition, there is some key information on what homosexuality is from a social and scientific point of view, in order to provide basic knowledge to every kind of reader. The book is completed by a section dedicated to homosexuality and art with a specific focus on literary works.

Clearly, your book is not only focused on Mainland China, but on Greater China as well, and on Chinese communities spread around Asia: did you find a common ground on LGBTQI+ topics among these communities or did you see a different degree of LGBTQI+ acceptance from one country to another?

As I've already mentioned, the sources of this book are coming from the greater Chinese community spread around the world, the list of countries and regions including Mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, South Korea, Thailand, Malaysia, and Australia.

Although these communities are living and adapting to different countries and regions, their common identity and background are Chinese and Catholic. Therefore there is a very similar family environment. The double influence of the Catholic faith and traditional Chinese culture is really strong. Unquestionably this combination results in huge pressure on gay people. Australia and Taiwan have a good overall situation, for example, but these coming out stories in the book show that Catholics are more burdened than ordinary people even in a highly inclusive social environment.

You are a Benedictine Oblate and you are carrying on your mission into the world. How do you exactly intend your mission? Is there any special charisma related to the Benedictine Order which shapes your mission? How could the Catholic Church and broader society benefit from this mission?

St Benedict's charism of moderation, stability and obedience to God's will are undoubtedly the cornerstone of my work. The Benedictine Order is built as a family-like structure with the Abbot at its head. This specific care of the Order toward the group requires a high degree of the charism of moderation. In my daily work, I have to face people with many different backgrounds and personalities in a huge variety of situations. We must avoid any extreme stance, as flexibility is a guiding spirit in the Rule.

Lack of commitment is a social problem that exists in both heterosexual and homosexual groups. It is reflected in every aspect of individual and social life and, for LGBTQI+ people it is particularly

manifested in self-identity and relationships of love. Stability, one of three vows of Benedictines, deeply rooted in God, constantly seeking for God's will, is particularly beneficial to our contemporary society. I think that in many of the stories in the book, the brothers' spiritual experience is so valuable, because even in the darkness they have never ceased to seek God.

St Benedict states in his Rule that "Let all guests who arrive be received as Christ" (Chapter 53). So what about LGBTQI+ people? Aren't we human too? The Church should open its arms and embrace gay people with and through gay Catholic groups. I strongly emphasise that our work is the work of the Church, not only the work of LGBTQI+ groups; it would be even better to say that the Church is working for LGBTQI+ people. I hope that the Church can look at these fraternal groups (including *Progetto Gionata*) as part of the Church's pastoral work without fearing them as a threat.

I'm glad to know that your book is helping Chinese Catholic communities around Asia for a better acceptance of LGBTQI+ people within the Church. How do local communities inform your work? Are you supported by some parishes or dioceses in your mission?

I don't dare to say the book is helping achieve wider acceptance around Asia. However, through the book's project, the gay Catholic community in the Asia-Pacific region is now connected in a much better way than in the past. Through this book, the Church has a new tool to understand the gay community across the region.

Traditional social media and we-media are good tools for effective communication. Through two *UCA News* stories and social platforms such as WeChat or Facebook, I have established relationships with many people and institutions in different countries. The Church's media in Mainland China usually releases some articles already published in other countries, and this has contributed to the spread of information about the book. The key is to create a strong link in order to help communities around the world interconnect and better understand each other's work. For example, the China Catholic Rainbow Community is a member of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics and the Asia-Pacific Network

of Rainbow Catholics. Everyone can communicate with each other through the network.

We did get support from some parishes, but nothing like the diocesan-level support of LGBT Westminster in London. I would like to mention a specific case in 2014 in which a parish priest in Southern China showed particular care toward LGBTQI+ people, offering us a room for our Sunday event. We met there for four months, until some very conservative lay people openly attacked our activities on Weibo and we eventually had to meet elsewhere.

My personal experience, however, is quite different. Friends in many congregations and communities have expressed great approval and support for my work. I'm very grateful and I feel truly blessed. At the first assembly of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics in Rome in October 2015, I learned that gay Catholic groups in many countries are supported by different religious congregations and missionaries. In the United States, congregations of nuns have offered a lot of support for gay Catholic groups.

Let's be honest: we are a minority, part of another minority! Our Italian readers often experience double discrimination, as LGBTQI+ people from the Catholic Church and as believers from the broader gay society. I guess the situation in China could be even more complicated. Could you share with us some insights about being Catholic and gay in a traditional society like China?

Since 2009, I have been working for gay Christian groups and I have been communicating with secular LGBTQI+ activists and groups all this time. China's two major gay magazines, *GaySpot* and *Togayther*, have both published my articles about the gay Catholic issue. Most recently, *GaySpot* specifically introduced my new book. I have always emphasised that the gay Christian movement is also part of the LGBTQI+ movement. However, I've met a permanent deacon from the diocese of Hong Kong who does not agree: he can respect gay people, even accept them according to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*'s teaching, but he considers the LGBTQI+ movement to be very problematic.

In the case of China, I see your point. We are indeed a minority

of a minority. In the secular LGBTQI+ community, we may be easily overlooked, but I never feel that I have been discriminated against for being Catholic. I guess that this is roughly related to the change of religious attitudes in Chinese society today. At the same time, LGBTQI+ people are generally more educated and more understanding. Maybe our understanding of 'discrimination' is different?

A pivotal chapter in your book is a straightforward essay on the benefits that a broader acceptance of LGBTQI+ people could bring to the Church, like more transparency or inclusion. Could you tell us more?

The modern media constantly portrays the dark side of human experience. I often feel that the Catholic Church is unable to fight malicious gossip because of a lack of transparency (I don't mean that no one in the Church has ever made mistakes, but it's true that nowadays it's very popular to criticise the Catholic Church without any serious consequence. I don't see the same attitude towards other religions). It is ridiculous that the Italian media has claimed a link between Pope Benedict XVI's resignation and threats from gay lobbying groups, but this is inseparable from the church's negative attitude toward gay people in the past. Today we have more detailed information showing that the vast majority of sexual offenders are heterosexuals. In the past, the Church unfairly linked sexual assaults to homosexuality.

Also puzzling are the voices about the so-called elite gay club of the Holy See. I hope those gay clergy or staff in the church can stand up and say that they are worthy of their vocation (they may fail, but they can stand up again, like many heterosexual clergy). In general, gay clergy can also be good clergymen; of course, many are too afraid to come out (there is no story from a gay clergyman in my book). This is a personal choice, but I think the ones that most negatively affect our work are those who are themselves in the closet while actively criticising homosexuals, only in the end to be exposed. Haven't we seen many cases like this? Some of these are unqualified to pastor in their spiritual condition. They are sceptical and resent those who came out, thinking they're making trouble for them. Finally, when the bad news comes out, it is the Church that takes the blame for them.

I would also like to mention that Krzysztof Charamsa came out with his boyfriend in 2015 (I attended the assembly of GNRC that week in Rome). His coming out has generated two negative responses. First, a majority of those in the Church believe it was a provocation in the name of the LGBTQI+ community. Secondly, people outside the church use it as fuel for their taunting critique of the institution of celibacy (I have heard such satirical voices during those days in Chinese Protestant groups). But at least he came out and this was a good thing for himself and for the Church. I believe it didn't make things worse (a worse situation may have occurred in the future if the church still keeps the same attitude towards gay people).

If the church can be more tolerant on gay issues, it will obviously reduce the possibility of many of these negative responses. As importantly, it will gain benefits in the discernment of the clergy's vocations. Here, I also particularly want to call on the Holy See to work with the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics to set up an official office to deal with the issues of the Church and the LGBTQI+ community, and to guide the local church officials to pastor local gay communities. As for inclusiveness, gay people are children of God too, and they are part of the church. Indeed they are the Church.

I believe your book could provide great support within European and Italian society, and I'm glad to hear that you're carrying out a translation in English. Please tell us the challenges you are facing to accomplish this project.

I hope so, and wish an English translation will soon be available. In December 2017, I attended the second GNRC assembly held in Munich-Dachau, and I had the opportunity to introduce my book to other participants at the assembly. Friends speaking a multitude of languages showed great enthusiasm for the book, and confirmed my sense that many could benefit from reading it.

I decided to have the book translated into English from the very beginning. My reading list of gay Christian texts is surely incomplete, but this book is definitely rare, and I believe it can provide huge support, not only to the Church in China, but to the Universal Church as well. It

is also valuable for the important part that spiritual exercise experiences play in its testimonies.

You are the founder of CCRC (China Catholic Rainbow Community): How is your association interacting with the Church? You have any open support? How do you foresee the direction of this association in the next five to ten years?

Interactions are naturally based on personal connections. For instance, members of our group put their trust in certain priests and nuns and then we introduce each other. At present, there are several priests and nuns participating in our group.

After the book was published in Chinese, I was contacted by many priests and seminaries willing to purchase it. I have been informed also that a few seminaries have the book in their libraries. I'm very glad to see these achievements. For instance, the book can act as a valuable guide for gay seminarians: whether they carry on in their vocation or decide to leave the seminary, it can help them not waste their youth and find their real vocation. It will also benefit the Church's engagement with matters of sexual orientation.

I hope that in the future we will see more priests and nuns and even bishops support gay Catholic groups in China and all world and help gay believers in their faith in order to live a better and more complete Christian life. As for predicting the future, my experience and my education shows me that everything is in the hands of God. I can only say that the road is rough and the future is bright; we keep doing our best today.

*I really want to tell you that the cover and the title (*May Your Lips Kiss Mine*) looks both really appealing and meaningful! Could you tell us more about how you designed the cover and chose the title?*

Thank you, many people have said the same thing! The title was my own choice. 'May your lips kiss mine' is the first verse of The Song of Songs, considered by many mystics to be a description of the love between man and God. For LGBTQI+ Catholics, it can seem that their love of God and

their love of another man/woman are contradictory. Feeling like sinners against Mother Church, they long not only for the kiss of God and the kiss of their lovers but also for a kiss from the Mother Church. This is what I was trying to express by this title.

The cover of the book is designed by Andy Yang, a well-known lyricist from Taiwan; he's a Christian LGBTQI+. I am very grateful for this wonderful design. One of my aunties once told me that a lot of Catholic leaders would get confused and perhaps turned off by the cover and the title of this book. But the Church has always longed for God through beauty and art, hasn't it?

Due to its proximity to the Vatican, Italy is sometimes considered as the 'Pope's own diocese', and the influence of the Church on Italian society is probably stronger than in any other country. This is creating a very special relationship with a huge impact on Christian LGBTQI+ as well. How do you see the Italian situation as an external observer?

If you are referring specifically to the situation of Italian gay issues, honestly I don't have much to say. I know that Italy passed the homosexual civil union bill two years ago, and that the rights granted to gay couples are much less than those of other European countries or Canada, for instance, but I'm not really an expert on these legal aspects. I want to say a few words about Ireland's adoption of the Same-Sex Marriage Act. I'm sure you understand why I'm talking about Ireland: It is another Catholic country that can be compared with Italy. When the bill was passed by the Irish parliament, the Vatican's Secretary of State Pietro Parolin said: "I think that you cannot just talk of a defeat for Christian principles, but of a defeat for humanity." But an Irish priest told me: "Perhaps the Holy Spirit spoke to the Church through the Irish vote, but the Church did not listen."

I think this applies to Italy too: it is a country both in the Universal Church and in the world. One by one these countries (and I'm proud to say that many of them are traditionally Catholic) are recognising same-sex relationships. Is the voice of the Holy Spirit still not clear enough?

I have an opinion that I am very proud of and that I used to share only with a small group of friends. I would like to share it now with your

Italian readers as well. The Church is usually seen as an enemy of same-sex marriage in many places, but we must recognise that many of the countries that pass same-sex marriages bills have Catholic and Christian roots. I believe that it was the Vatican II Council that opened the doors of the Church and promoted a wider interaction with the society. This helped to open up the legitimate path of same-sex marriage in these traditionally Catholic countries. The Church should not oppose the legalisation of same-sex marriage because this is one of the wonderful results of the Church opening the door, which I am confident is the voice of Holy Spirit.

At the same time, we must not forget that the Catholic Church has always been the most actively self-renewing entity in human history, and it has never been afraid of this self-renewal process. On the issue of the LGBTQI+ community, I believe that the Church will actively renew itself in the future.

Here, we have to mention an important symbol, that is, Pope Francis. I have heard that Italian people like him. I have travelled to many countries and different Christian groups and most of the persons I've met like him, too. Discernment is one of the charisms that the Church has always emphasised: I believe that people's love for Pope Francis is due to trust in his charism of discernment. We will wait and will see, and we will continue to pray for Pope Francis. May God help the Church to achieve its renovation through the Pope's service. Once, I had a chance to hear Patriarch Manuel III of Lisbon, who said, "I and many of my cardinal brothers hope that the next pope will be Francis II." Let's pray, that God will give us more compassionate merciful shepherds.

You have been in Italy several times and you know our country quite well. Is there a message you would like to send to our Italian readers?

Since I am talking with an Italian friend, I want to say that to love and cherish your own tradition, we all need to become more mature Catholics and cultivate a more mature Catholic consciousness. Nowadays, many people feel that they have to leave the church because of various issues, or they have already left to believe in God alone. If we leave, who will renew the Church? This is especially true for gay issues.

We need to pray for the Church, work with the Church in every field, believe in the Holy Spirit, give time to the Church, and keep hope for the renewal of the Church.

Thank you very much for your inspiring words, your activity and your mission to build up a more inclusive and glorious Church.

Thanks to you and thank you for your work: working together we can go further and further.

Fr Joseph's Interview with a Catholic Media Outlet

Editor's note: Father Joseph has been providing pastoral care to the China Catholic Rainbow Community since 2014. He has never deviated from the Church's teaching. He was not able, at the beginning of his ministry, to enter fully the life of the gay Catholics. Therefore, his pastoral experience becomes an invaluable one. It is hoped that through this interview and Father Joseph's writing in this book,[1] *more priests and pastors will gain an understanding of gay Catholics and this will motivate them to give pastoral care to gay Catholics. This is the full text of an interview he gave to a Catholic media outlet, which could only use parts of the quotes. Since this is unpublished, we will omit the name of the media outlet here.*

Catholic media: When did you start providing pastoral care to China Catholic Rainbow Community?

Fr Joseph: It has been two years since I started getting in touch with them.

How did you get in touch with them? And how did you become willing to serve the group?

My knowledge about the gay community came mainly from books and newspapers, and I thought that they were extremely small in number. In the small society where I live, I did not even have a sense of their existence. I thought that gay people lived only in metropolitan cities. And my impression was very negative when it came to talking about homosexuals. In my subconscious I counted them as sinners, whom we always condemn.

[1] See *May Your Lips Kiss Mine*, p. 268-272.《彩虹世界》

Suddenly one day, a teenage boy whom I knew quite well came to me, telling me honestly that he was gay. His action of coming out to me was done when he had trust in me, after a period of observation. He had a lot of sorrows concerned with love affairs, marriage, family and sex. He had been living in a seminary for over a year. He was the one who opened the window for me so that I could see a different world, getting to know about the gay community which was not normally known in general society. He introduced me to a chat group formed by gay Christians. I did not dare to say anything publicly at the beginning and was just listening. I did so to keep them from knowing my identity. Yet their topics sometimes irritated me, and I could not refrain from participating in their discussion. I told them that the Bible is against homosexuality and warned that they should not speak without thinking. I kept quoting Bible verses to point out their errors. This gave negative results: they did not like what I was doing. During these exchanges they realised that I was a priest. This made them curious and they connected with me individually. They asked different types of questions. Some of them even made me embarrassed.

- Are you a gay priest? What do you think about homosexuality?
- What is the attitude of the Catholic Church towards homosexuality?
- Father, would you accept us gay people? Do gay people sin when they have a relationship?
- I am hurt. I am very unhappy. Do you have any suggestions that could help me out?
- I am gay. I undergo huge pressure from my family. My parents are pushing me into a marriage. What should I do?
- I have a very good partner now. But I feel guilty. Can you tell me what should I do?
- Why does God create gay people? I do not want to be gay. Yet, I like boys. What should I do?
- I hate the traditional Church. They condemn gay people. What do you think?
- How do you satisfy your sexual needs? Do you really live a chaste life?

- Does God want all gay people to live a chaste life?
- Father, I am married. I have my own family. I love my wife and my children. But I cannot hold back when I see a boy I like. Deep inside my heart I hate myself when I cannot hold back. But every time I lose control. Could you please pray for me?

In these exchanges, I saw the real-life of another group of people in this world. It is especially easy for them to accept Christianity as they need the support of a faith and the acceptance of God. 'Jesus loves gay people' has somehow become their cry of faith. From it one can feel their desire for God. They also long for the acceptance of others. In real-life situations, however, they always face non-acceptance, rejection and condemnation. They suffer a lot in the Church. They may look strong, but they are really fragile and sensitive. When others utter words of mild disagreement, they will easily become irritated and sometimes even feel hurt. These reactions reflect the knots tied in their real lives. On the one hand they wish to develop a romance, form a family and enjoy friendship and family warmth like everyone else; on the other hand, they see it as impossible because of their homosexuality. They limit themselves to their little social circles among their gay fellows. They look for romance. They search for ways to live. But many of them live like a tied knot. And some get infected with STDs and HIV/AIDS. Many of them come to me and ask, "Father, why did God make me a gay? I don't want to be like this. But I can't change my orientation. Can you tell me what should I do?"

They are happy to know that I am a priest, and say that I am brave to talk with them face-to-face. Regardless of my attitude and stance, they say, my mere presence among them makes them feel comforted. They tell me about their lives and their problems, hoping to hear words of recognition and comfort, as well as solutions to their problems, from the mouth of a priestly servant of their God. They are happy enough when the servant of God stays with them and listens to them. Through these exchanges, I became friends with many. My companionship became effective, as they found confidence in their faith, knowing that God loves them and does not abandon them. The complexities they have seem to ease a bit when they learn to let go and allow their lives to depend on God. Their changes in attitude have encouraged me a lot. I am happy

that I can do something for them. This process takes time, of course, and requires a lot of patience and a lot of love. I need to accept them, to love them with the compassion of Jesus. They do love me and respect me; and they are friendly with me. I also pray to learn God's will about me, whether I have the grace to continue my service to them.

How do you usually provide your pastoral service to them?

Modern telecommunications made it easy for them to pass around the news about me. Gay Christian fellowships across the country have included me in their chat groups. These chat groups are not virtual ones. Their group represents a vivid gay Christian community. There are groups in different cities. And it is a whole new world.

I usually use WeChat or QQ to interact with them. But gradually, there are individuals coming to meet me where I live, to exchange and share with me, and ask me for guidance. There were also some of them coming for confession. Among them some had not confessed for years as they felt shy or worried that their priests might recognise them. They did not want to come out, and most of all they were afraid of being expelled from the Church. There were some who brought their families for a holiday, and would attempt to see me, as a chance for confession. There were times I needed to travel to another city for work. Once I arrived, I would take the opportunity to meet them and share with them. I started also to try to attend their gatherings. I have so far attended several of them. They were happy to see me and received me with great passion. Every time I was there, they asked me to share on a specific topic. I usually declined and said that I don't need to give a homily, but just meet them as friends, so that we share with each other. Most of them were Protestants but they passionately received me, a Catholic priest, without feeling any disharmony because of the difference in denomination. There was a group comprised of a somewhat larger number of Catholics who once invited me to celebrate Mass for them. There, I could observe how piously they took part in it and so did their Protestant fellows. I gave a blessing after Mass by laying my hands over their heads and they bowed their heads with tears rolling from their eyes. I was deeply touched by such a scene.

I live somewhere close to Beijing and that is why I have more contacts with the fellowship in the capital city. They gradually build up more trust in me; and they invite me to take part in monthly sharing as well as to join their festive celebrations.

I have my own assignment. Yet I am willing to try my best to show my care for them. Whenever they need me, I do not reject them. Jesus never rejected anybody.

What do you think about how the Church in mainland China in general recognises gay Christians?

I would say it is mysterious and strange. When we talk about homosexuality, we usually think immediately of the biblical description of the city of Sodom, and our conscience generally equates homosexuality with sin. There is a vacuum in pastoral study and actual provision of pastoral care to these people. Priests are reluctant to touch on this area. I have only heard of a nun who offers pastoral care to a gay group in her hometown. There was once a priest who allowed gay Catholics to hold Sunday gatherings in his parish but suffered fierce opposition from some of his parishioners. Bad rumours started to circulate in the parish community and the group was subsequently forced to move away.

Have you ever encountered any challenges, say words of dismay from bishops and priests commenting your ministry?

Seldom do I tell anyone else about my ministry in great detail so far, as I understand very well how the Church reacts to homosexuals and so does society. There were occasions when I talked with some priests and nuns in an exploratory manner on issues regarding homosexuality. They did not understand much, and their limited textbook knowledge was acquired during their theological study. They did not study in depth. Neither did they have many contacts with them, or the contacts were limited to the time in confession and some individual chit-chats. Their attitudes were usually negative. They always kindly reminded me that I should be careful.

Among your previous experiences of providing pastoral care to homosexuals, what was the most impressive? Was there anything memorable?

I mentioned quite a lot of it just now. Through the contact with the homosexuals, I feel a change deep inside them. There was a gay man from the province of Hebei. He was not a Christian, but he had a desire for the Church. We had been in touch via QQ and I felt that there was great pain and many tangles in his heart. He sometimes called me and we talked more than an hour over the phone. I was not able to say anything, only listen to him and give a short reply occasionally. Then one day I felt it suitable to visit him in person; he received me passionately.

He was a young man, well educated and well behaved. He had his own way of thinking and could express himself well. He was a civil servant with a kind heart, as delicate as a woman's. His gestures were also like those of a girl. He came to my room in a hotel and he spent all the time telling his story. Although he was not a Christian, I was surprised to find that his ethical thinking and traditional morality was the same as that of the Catholic Church.

He could not accept his biologically masculine physique and even had an urge to go through transgender surgery (I later realised that this was a case of transgenderism and not homosexuality). His desire not only caused him internal conflict, but also distress in his social life. He was outstanding, and his family was proud of him. It was time for him to marry and have his own family. Colleagues, friends and his superiors continued to introduce female partners to him. He was tired of answering and people just failed to understand him. He tried hard to avoid the care and concern of others, but at the same time he had a great sense of loneliness. Among his colleagues in the same service, there were some who were withdrawn, aged or divorced. They were marginalised in the social circle. He was afraid that he would become one of them. His father became more and more irritated because of the marriage issue. His father was disappointed as it was a matter of 'face'. His mother, meanwhile, loved him so much that she wanted to keep her son by her side. Yet, he wanted to leave his hometown to avoid all acquaintances. He wanted to live without pressure and to turn away from that mental

suffering. He wanted a life of freedom.

We talked a lot. He was very happy about my visit. He trusted me a lot for my identity as a priest. He had never told others about himself, but he became unreserved when he told me everything about him. It seemed that he felt relief right away. I could not provide any constructive suggestion, but I could listen to him patiently. I listened to his words spoken from his heart and tried to feel them sympathetically. He bought me a meal. We visited some churches and travelled around the city. He was very talkative. And indeed, I was listening to him most of the time.

We kept up our dialogue via the internet and the phone after I left. He shared with me his feelings, his wisdom of life, and his understanding of life and faith. I could feel that he was improving emotionally. Letting go of things that entangled him, he experienced a huge breakthrough.

He got strong inspiration from faith. Here is what he texted me:

> When I let go of everything, God brings me peace beyond all expectations. Even though I still worry about the future, I am learning to entrust the worry to him. Jesus said, 'Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened' (Matthew 11:28). If only I think about that, I feel my burden is less heavy. When I let go of everything, to 'tell God all desires of every kind, in prayer and petition shot through with gratitude, and the peace of God which is beyond our understanding will guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus' (Philippians 4:6-7). I used to think that I needed to make everything depend on myself. It might be that I have grown stronger, but at the same time my heart has become hardened. I keep reading the Bible lately and now come to know how to pray. I am leaving my old ego to die and am now born again. The change happening to me is a miracle. Life itself is a miracle. And I believe there will be more miracles happening. The desire to live has strengthened my will, and this is because God is love. Yet, the worries in life, few or many, small and big, are all unavoidable. Facing these troubles, I try not to think about them too often. And I just live my day at its own rhythm. And when I think of your care, father, I feel the warmth, so that love and hope are the force to support my life. I know that you worry about me. Instead of worrying about me, why don't you bless me for a better future? Father, thank you!

What do you think about this book edited by Eros?

I am one of the authors contributing articles. I am thankful to Eros. He is full of passion for the Church of God, and firm in his faith in God. He is willing to speak for the group and that allows the Church to listen to the real-life of homosexuals. They are no different from other people, except that they have a different sexual orientation. They are more sensitive to the small differences in feelings, are more passionate about life and more eager to search for the beauty in things. They are even more passionate about the Church. As they do not have a family as normal people do, they have a stronger sense of belonging to the Church. They love their priests, as they wish to experience their paternal care. They love arts, and search for every detail of perfection and a higher dignity of life. They have their weaknesses too, of course. For them it is easier, so to speak, to lead a dissolute life. But that leads them into a vicious circle of greater pain and regret. In order to be accepted by their surroundings, their very sensitive character tends to push people away who have intentions for them, good or bad.

So, this book describes the real-life situation of gay Catholics in China (as well as other Chinese societies). The aim of this book is that the Church should not ignore them, but give more care, show understanding and be ready to accompany them. It helps them move forward in their journey of life and faith. This book is of practical and pastoral meaning.

What changes do you think the universal Church needs to make in order to provide pastoral care to homosexuals?

First things first: it needs to eliminate the long-expounded prejudice, and to do what is suggested in the Catechism, that they "must be accepted with respect, compassion, and sensitivity" (CCC §2358).

Second, the whole Church should show more care towards them. There have been a lot of discussions taking place in the Churches in Europe and in the Americas. The Church in China, however, has completely ignored this.

Third, we should devise a pastoral plan for them. There needs to be more people in the Church studying this issue. Considering the characteristics of the topic, we need to be especially patient and cautious in our provision of care.

Also, the Church needs to speak out for their human rights, inviting people to treat them with a normal heart and not discriminate against them.

In addition, we need a dialogue which allows us to listen to each other. The Church should be there to help everyone discern God's plan for them, to discern between good and bad. The Church should listen to them and make the Church a family for them, so that they can also experience the maternal love of the Mother Church.

Furthermore, the Church has to establish a specialised department or assign trained personnel for pastoral services to them.

Lastly, the Church should lead the gay Catholics who have a fervent faith to organise their own parish group, where they can receive guidance and assistance from the Church so that they could achieve personal development in the group.

Coming Out of 'Exile in Babylon' on the Issue of Homosexuality: LGBTQI+ People's Voice to the Synod of Bishops

Eros Shaw

Part I: What I saw and heard during the assembly

Rome, the capital of Italy and the capital of the ancient Roman Empire is the place where St Peter[1] and St Paul[2] were martyred. Within the Pentarchy, the Roman Church enjoyed a status of first among equals (*primus inter pares*).[3] It is where the Holy See of the Catholic Church is now located, and is a holy place for its 1.36 billion members.

This was the third time I visited Rome. I had heard of the saying 'All roads lead to Rome' when I was young. The first two times, I came as a pilgrim, but this time I had an extra identity. I came to attend the

---

1 St Peter was one of Jesus' twelve Apostles and their leader. He is considered as the first Pope. In Catholicism, the Roman Popes are successors of St Peter, see the Gospel of Matthew: "You are Peter. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven" (16: 13-20). St Peter died as a martyr in Rome and his tomb lies beneath St Peter's Basilica in the Vatican.

2 St Paul is the 'Apostle to the Gentiles.' Thirteen Epistles in the New Testament were written by St Paul. The saint died as a martyr in Rome. His tomb lies beneath the Basilica of St Paul Outside the Walls.

3 *Primus inter pares* is a Latin phrase. In the early centuries of Christianity, there was the Pentarchy, the group of five main Churches: Rome, Alexandria, Antioch, Constantinople and Jerusalem. As St Peter and St Paul were martyred in Rome, Rome was given the status of the first among equals. This was confirmed at the First Council in Nicaea.

assembly organised by the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics. The meeting would take place October 1-4, 2015 and would focus on the relationship between the Catholic Church and various issues concerning homosexuality. For the rest of October, a Synod of Bishops would take place on the theme of the family. It seemed to me that I was standing at a junction in history.

I left the airport by bus. The bus passed by the Basilica of St Paul. I prayed here several months ago. Beneath the Basilica lies the tomb of St Paul. I prayed to him again: "The problem came from you, and you have to help solve it." A few Bible verses in the New Testament that are used to speak against homosexuality were written by St Paul. Jesus said nothing regarding homosexuality. I prayed that St Paul who is now in heaven would resolve the mess created by those who use his words (this is not limited to the issue of homosexuality, but also other theological discussions).

After the referendum on same-sex marriage in Ireland, Cardinal Kasper[4] said that same-sex marriage would become a central issue for the 2015 Synod of Bishops. Yet I heard something different from a priest who had been living in Rome for a long time, and from a chaplain working with gay Catholics in the Archdiocese of Westminster: that the Synod would not touch on issues regarding homosexuality. As for why they were so certain, my understanding was that the Church insisted on equating family with the union of a man and a woman. As the theme for the Synod of Bishops was family, then it would discuss issues concerning divorce and re-marriage. But homosexuality could only be raised as a secondary topic, as it still had no relation to family.

What about Pope Francis, who chaired the Synod? Was not his merciful voice heard in the Church and in the society? I prayed that a miracle would happen. I stayed at a hotel next to the Basilica of St Peter. It was operated by the Order of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Captives.[5] On the first night there, I went to the nearby Church of the

---

[4] Cardinal Walter Kasper (1933-), a German theologian who was the president of Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity. He is regarded by the media as a member of the progressive camp in the Vatican.

[5] The Order of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Captives was approved by Pope

Most Holy Trinity to pray. At the entrance there was a statue of Our Lady of Sorrows,[6] the patroness of our community.[7] I hoped that this was a good sign for us.

On the second day, I took a bus to the venue at the Centro Pellegrini in the Via Vincenzo Ambrosio.

The assembly welcomed 61 representatives from over 30 countries. There were some Africans who could not participate because the nature of the assembly did not allow them to acquire a visa. The following persons in the assembly attracted our attention:

Sr Jeannine Gramick is a co-founder of New Ways Ministry. Since the 1970s, she has participated in the pastoral ministry for LGBTQI+ Catholics. As the Holy See did not agree with her stance, Pope John Paul II signed a decree ordering her to suspend her work.

Bp Raul Vera of Saltillo came from Mexico. He is well known for his support for human rights and social justice, including his support for LGBTQI+ Catholics. He was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 and 2013.

Fr James Alison is an internationally known fighter for LGBTQI+ rights and a prolific author. I recently read his book *Broken Hearts and New Creations: Intimations of a Great Reversal*.

There was also Mary MacAleese, former president of Ireland. She was to speak at a public conference 'Ways of Love—Snapshots of Catholic Encounters with LGBT People and their Families.'

On the first day of the assembly, we introduced ourselves and our

---

Innocent III in 1198, with St Felix of Valois and St John of Matha as the co-founders. The Trinitarian order was founded to help the Christians captured by Muslims during the Crusades. According to Church documents, the order had set free more than 900,000 captives by the year 1787.

6 The seven sorrows are those sufferings that the Virgin Mary endured in her life and are in contrast to her seven joys. Our Lady of Seven Sorrows is a symbol for sharing the sorrows of people with homosexual orientation and other sexual minorities, for accompanying them and empowering them to share the seven joys of Our Lady. The memorial of Our Lady of Sorrows is on September 15.

7 A patron saint is a special protector or a guardian of a person, a group or a movement. Among the Asian Catholics, everyone would name themselves after a saint and to learn from the saint who is also regarded as a role model of faith life. They also pray for the intercession of the patron.

respective organisations and work. There were national flags of different countries. There was a meaningful scene when Sr Gramick, as an American, stood in front of the Vatican flag. This made everyone laugh.

All the organisations coming from the five continents introduced their own work. I introduced what we did in China that afternoon. I introduced the China Rainbow Witness Fellowship as well as the China Catholic Rainbow Community. I also showed the participants the booklet *When We (LGBTQI+) Meet Up With Jesus.* One of them came to me after the assembly, saying that he was amazed with the work that has been done in China.

Fr Pedro Labrín from Chile had continuously provided pastoral care to LGBTQI+ Catholics in his place. He showed us a photo taken on St Peter's Square capturing the moment when Fr Labrín presented Pope Francis with a photo showing the group of Catholics under the priest's pastoral care carrying a rainbow flag. In the photo Fr Labrín showed us, we could see the cheerful look of the Pope. We did not know what the Pope was thinking about. Fr Labrín said the development of the Catechesis is a development of the *law of love* instead of the development of the *love of law*.

A friend from the Czech Republic made a significant statement: "If I was not a gay, I would not have become a Christian." He was trying to say that his gay identity made him feel thankful for God's miraculous creation. While many gays have been fighting for their rights, some of them are self-blaming and self-pitying. Deep down in their hearts, they are not able to identify with themselves. The words of this Czech friend are a source of inspiration.

There were many other organisations taking part and I cannot name them all. You can read about the experiences of these various organisations in a press release on the website of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics.

In the sharing session on the second day, Bishop Raul Vera, Fr Pedro Labrín, Tyrone from Malta, Rev JP from Sweden and I were assigned to the same group.

I was impressed with the speech of Rev JP. This Lutheran pastor from Sweden said that the Church has an urgent need to redefine the meaning of 'family'. He quoted examples to discuss the variety in the composition

of a family: a 12-year-old girl selling potatoes to support her brother's study after their parents died; and a grandmother taking care of her grandson assiduously when both of his parents were not around. Are these families?

Tyrone attributed the Church's conservative sexual ideology to St Augustine.[8]

Every day the conference was concluded with a Holy Mass.

One day a Brazilian priest celebrated the Mass. In his homily he shared about the beginning of his pastoral care for the gays. He said: "In the city where I live, there is a gay Catholic whose parents regarded his sexual orientation as a demonic possession. He had planned to take his own life, but his classmate invited him to a Mass, where the priest in his homily reminded him about hope. He then stopped thinking of committing suicide." The Brazilian priest suddenly changed his tone, saying: "I know that gay Catholic... I was that priest."

The third day was devoted to the 'Ways of Love' forum. Media gathered to cover the event. At the same time, news broke that Fr Krzysztof Charamsa had come out of the closet and that the Pope had met Kim Davis.[9] For a moment, everyone was in a state of complex elation, with both positive and negative emotions.

Mary MacAleese, former President of Ireland, shared her experience: "I started to support gay rights when I was young. Then when my son came out to me, I was thankful that my earlier experience had helped provide a relaxed atmosphere for my child to grow up in. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says that homosexuals are 'intrinsically disordered' and such a statement is absolutely wrong. Christianity is not just another ideology: Jesus was incarnate as a human being of flesh and blood, that people could touch."

After finishing her term of office, she went to Rome and studied

---

8 St Augustine lived a hedonistic and unrestrained life in his youth and was lax about sex. This experience influenced his interpretation of sex in his theological study after his conversion. St Augustine was a prolific writer. Theologians have developed different points of view from his writings.

9 See *May Your Lips Kiss Mine*, p.318-323. 《关于「基多福 • 哈拉姆萨神父出柜」及「教宗接见金 • 戴维斯」的几点澄清及反思》

for a doctoral degree in Canon Law. It was her wish to speak for the homosexuals in the Church.

"I have met many gay clerics. They said they could not say anything, because it is the rule of the game," she said.

The closing Mass that day was celebrated by Bishop Raul Vera. He said during his homily: "I have not lost hope. Masses are celebrated for our gay friends in my diocese. And gay Catholics have to know that the Church needs them too."

During the assembly that lasted for three and a half days, I was filled with a ray of hope. On the one hand, I personally found it encouraging that many lay people involved in gay ministry have a theological background and a high level of culture. This certainly helps to lay a solid foundation for a dialogue with a broader perspective in the future. On the other hand, many participants received support from the Jesuits[10] to different degrees. And I have the same experience too. In Poland, there is support from the Dominicans;[11] while in Thailand there is support from the members of the Society of the Divine Word.[12] We cannot say that each of these congregations as a whole shows support for gay rights but at least some individuals from these congregations do offer their support. Sr Jeannine Gramick commented that religious women in the US tend to give greater support than religious men do.

When I posted news about this conference on a Chinese social media platform, there were only a few responses. Who should show concern for this great event for gay Catholics? Whether they are members of the LGBTQI+ community or of the Catholic Church, shouldn't my fellow

---

[10] The Society of Jesus is one of the religious congregations of the Catholic Church. It was co-founded by St Ignatius of Loyola, St Pierre Faber and five other companions in Paris, France, on August 15, 1534. Besides professing the usual three vows, a Jesuit professes a fourth vow of obedience to the Pope. The influence of St Ignatius' *Spiritual Exercises* is profound. The Jesuits have made great contributions in education. The predecessor of Fudan University was the Aurora University founded by the Jesuits.

[11] The Order of Preachers, also known as the Dominican Order, is one of the religious congregations of the Catholic Church. It was founded by St Dominic of Osma in 1215 with the aim of winning back people converted to the Albigensian heresy.

[12] The Society of the Divine Word is one of the religious congregations of the Catholic Church. It was founded by a German priest Fr. Arnold Janssen in 1875.

mainland Chinese pay more attention to it, and share the joy of every interaction and dialogue? After all, there is not a single dialogue isolated from others. So I have been encouraging gay Christian groups to take part actively in the gay movement. Especially for us who share these two identities, we can say we are gay members of the Church, as well as Christians in the gay community. We are in both places, and in both places, we are to become companions.

Part II: Difficulty with dialogue

We heard a story about a Catholic who went to talk with his bishop about his own life. In response, the bishop said it was all about sex. The Catholic replied, "No, bishop. It is not just about sex" (it is because of this story that Tyrone from Malta came to comment on the Church's biased stance based on the mistakes of St Augustine).

It is really difficult for dialogue to take place. Many bishops and priests are talented. Yet, they cannot understand the real situation of gay Catholics and rush to conclusions. This creates a big barrier for dialogue. Here are some other examples.

A staff member of the Diocesan Youth Commission in Hong Kong told *UCA News*, "Although family problems in Hong Kong are not as severe as those in Western countries, our problem is still serious. Since the law for same-sex marriage was passed in the US, we observe that many young people in Hong Kong have put up a rainbow icon in the profile photos of their Facebook accounts." He added, "I believe that they did so out of compassion, but I am worried whether they really understand the possible influence behind it. That is why we need to bring them the teachings and the values of the Church. These voices should be brought to the bishops' Synod."[13]

When young people in Hong Kong were being lauded for their stance on public affairs, why was there a worry that they did not understand the impact of gay marriage? Such a double standard is absurd.

Here is another example: Brian Burch, the head of Catholic Vote, which is a lay-run political advocacy organisation based in Chicago,

[13] Chinese site of *UCA News*, September 1, 2015.

said "Will the other side respect Americans who believe in male-female marriage? I suspect not. The Church will have to reflect on how to defend these truths in light of a movement that has shown an utter lack of respect or willingness to compromise."[14] A lack of respect and an unwillingness to compromise are probably what the LGBTQI+ groups experience as coming from their opponents.

Yet another example is this: A staff member of Hong Kong's Diocesan Pastoral Commission for Marriage and the Family[15] said, "Although the movement of promoting same-sex marriage in Hong Kong is not as 'serious' as it is in Taiwan and in the States, the situation is urgent. The gay groups promote same-sex marriage and equality on the surface, but they are really promoting sexual liberation."[16]

Such deliberate ignorance is simply horrifying. It is no wonder that the commission published the outrageous book *Homosexuality and Hope*. This book not only says that same-sex attraction can be prevented (if it is genuine homosexuality), it also cites inaccurate information that same-sex unions would lead to more domestic violence, depression, drug abuse and infection with STDs. But how much is more? Are there fewer cases of domestic violence, depression and drug abuse in heterosexual families? On the back cover of the book, there is a

---

[14] Michael O'Loughlin, 'Catholics react to Supreme Court's marriage decision,' *Crux*, June 26, 2015. https://cruxnow.com/life/2015/06/26/catholics-react-to-supreme-courts-marriage-decision.

[15] I once visited the Cathedral of the Hong Kong diocese to pray. There I saw an icon of Our Lady of the Ark of the Covenant distributed by Diocesan Pastoral Commission for Marriage and the Family. I liked the icon and got some copies that I brought back to China as a souvenir for my friends. Later I met a gay American professor, in his late 40s, who fell in love with a gay friend of mine. I gave them a copy of the icon. The professor said to me, "I have been keeping the icon you gave me." Some of my friends from the Protestant Church who were given copies of the icon also came and talked about it. Contrary to the prevalent misunderstanding, many homosexuals appreciate a loyal one-to-one relationship, but when will Canon Law consider the genuine desire of gay Catholics?

[16] Chinese site of *UCA News*, October 6, 2015. The gay community is often labelled as being unrestrained in various ways. However, contrary to the understanding of many, homosexuals generally admire the long lasting love their parents live. Many gay Catholics are far more conservative in issues of married priests, women priests and divorce. They are more capable of appreciating the beauty of some ideals.

testimony by a leader of an "ex-gay growth group." The leader claims that he chose to grow, to marry and to father a child. If this leader was in actual fact straight, there would be no problem. If he was gay, it would be a case of self-delusion. Another testimony printed on the back cover says, "I recognised my homosexual orientation when I was in high school. Thanks to God's protection, I have never developed a real homosexual relationship. The world today is telling us that it is normal to be homosexual, but the sharing in this book keeps us away from deception." The words of the staff member and the book show the great disrespect and misunderstanding they display to the members of the homosexual community. They are satisfied to find only materials and data from outdated books that support their position. Whatever data they might find in the West, I could answer by quoting completely opposite evidence. They have refused to understand that there are gay people living all around them, who are not merely objects in statistics.

These three cases consistently show the same kind of arrogance. Such people inevitably retain their own way of thinking, saying that homosexuals and their supporters fail to understand them and would even oppress them. Yet, my personal experience and the experience of the Rome conference have told me that the representatives of the gay Catholics not only fully understand the teachings of the Church, but are also able to understand the position, and its deep implication, expressed by those who oppose gay rights. We are willing to dialogue and exchange our views. We are not willing, however, to repeat incessantly and needlessly our position. We are not afraid of any contact, because we are all members of the Church. We are all children of God, so we can sit down to listen and to talk.

On the contrary, I have written to Diocesan Committee for the Pastoral Care of Persons with Same-sex Attraction[17] to express my wish

[17] The Diocesan Committee for the Pastoral Care of Persons with Same-sex Attraction is now dissolved. Its work has been taken over by the Diocesan Pastoral Commission for Marriage and the Family, chaired by Permanent Deacon Stephen Lee Bun-sang. I have mixed feelings about the Commission for Marriage and the Family taking over that ministry. During the 2015 Synod in Rome, media reported that one of the participating bishops raised a motion in favor of not discussing any issue related to homosexuality. Instead, he suggested convening another Synod specifically on this

for a private meeting. To that email I also attached a copy of the booklet *When We (LGBTQI+) Meet Up With Jesus*. They rejected my invitation saying that they were too busy. I wonder if they sincerely care about gay Catholics, given that my email has expressed the wish to learn from them the way of providing pastoral care, and stated clearly the situation of our group (which had barely a hundred gay Catholics). However, they refused to meet. How could they actually realise their care? According to our friends in Hong Kong, the committee has only worked with parents of a few gay Catholics. One can imagine how much pressure this group of parents would have faced.

As for Cardinal John Tong Hon,[18] many Catholics of Hong Kong diocese say that this prelate has been adopting a mild stance over all issues. However, he adopted a very strong and negative stance against homosexuality. He not only used outdated materials (an extremely outdated book *Homosexuality and the Catholic Church*) in his pastoral letters. In his recent pastoral letter,[19] he caused a controversy when he called on Catholics to consider the stance of candidates in the district council election concerning the proposed bill against discrimination based on sexual orientation.[20]

---

topic. In other words, he was trying to say that the issue of homosexuality is not an issue related to the family. However, I would be happy to see a Synod of bishops especially convened to discuss issues related to homosexuality. The decision of the Hong Kong diocese of having the Commission for Marriage and the Family take over the ministry for homosexuals is actually going in a reverse direction. A diocesan notice claimed that the arrangement was "in response to the promotion of marriage and family life that the 14th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops had emphasised, and as well a better utilization of human and material resources". However, in the Pope's *Amoris Laetitia* the issue of homosexuality is not completely excluded from family issues. Readers may also refer to the press release by the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics. See also: https://catholic.org.hk/v2/b5/chancery/achancery_2015_1116.html

[18] Cardinal John Tong Hon (1939-), emeritus bishop of the diocese of Hong Kong.

[19] The Chinese version of the pastoral letter can be found at http://www.catholic.org.hk/v2/b5/message_bishop/20151105.html.

[20] The first hyperlink brings readers to interviews with some gay Catholics in Hong Kong. http://www.tzjdt.cn/archives/990 At the same time we need to listen to different voices. Cardinal Tong's explanation is another example. http://www.inmediahk.net/node/1038974

In fact, a correct political view has deeply taken root in our civil society. The homosexual community is no longer a discriminated group. Many anti-gay activists would even describe the gay community as "homophobia-phobic."[21] When the gay issue is involved, words from many of the Church personnel take on a strange aspect. If we remember that Cardinal Parolin called the Irish referendum in favour of marriage equality "a defeat of humanity,"[22] it makes us shudder with fear. Until today, it seems that they have never used strong words as such in any other issues. But when facing gay groups, these Church leaders become so harsh. This is really strange. Now we must remember that there are bishops in Africa who even support the criminalisation of homosexuality.

Such contradiction may never be overcome. But everyone has freedom of conscience and it must be respected. Because of this, we need a more merciful voice, mutual understanding and the courage to sit down and dialogue. How I wish this meeting of the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics in Rome would become an opportunity for the Church to get away from being "prisoner of Babylon on the issue of homosexuality," and that during the coming Synod of Bishops it can become more normal, more open and more courageous for the Church to discuss homosexuality.

---

[21] Please refer to the hyperlink: http://gdottv.com/main/archives/9012

[22] Ireland held a referendum about legalising same-sex marriage on May 22, 2015. In the evening of May 26, the Vatican's Secretary of State Cardinal Pietro Parolin said in the award presentation ceremony of the Centesimus Annus foundation that the passing of the referendum was not only a defeat of principles of the Christian faith but also a defeat of humanity (the Chinese report was taken from *Tianzhujiao Zaixian* 天主教在线). Regarding this same news, a Colombian conferee told me that it might be the work of the Holy Spirit speaking to the Church through the result of the referendum but the Church failed to listen. His comments made me think of how Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah. "This people's heart has grown coarse, their ears dulled, they have shut their eyes tight to avoid using their eyes to see, their ears to hear, their heart to understand, changing their ways and being healed by me." (Matthew 13:15)

Part III: Reflection on news reported after the assembly

The Synod of Bishops with the theme of family was convened on October 5, which was also the second day of the meeting of Global Network of Rainbow Catholics in Rome. The Network later sent a letter to the Synod, expressing our attitude and our stance. We did not receive any official reply from the Church. During the synod, the *Vatican News* kept reporting official news. I paid close attention to the wording used in the news report. I captured some meaningful ones here:

Answering the journalists' questions on the issues of homosexuality, Cardinal Peter Turkson, then prefect of Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, and Cardinal Gérald Lacroix of Quebec, Canada stressed that the Bishops' Synod had also studied the issue, especially the experiences of those who have a homosexual member in their families. Cardinal Turkson said, "We should not criminalise this phenomenon. But at the same time we cannot let those who see it as a 'problem' be criminalised."[23]

I totally agreed with the cardinals who stressed the first part. As mentioned earlier, the power of defining the issue is in the hands of those who see the issue as a 'problem.' Whatever good or bad they say, the Church will listen to them and take their comment as the Church's comment. If we cannot sit down to talk, we will become victims.

Anca Maria Cernea told *Vatican News* on October 23:

> We, as Catholic doctors defending life and family, can see this as, first of all, a spiritual battle. Material poverty and consumerism are not the primary causes of the family crisis. The primary cause of the sexual and cultural revolution is ideological. Our Lady of Fatima has said that Russia's errors would spread all over the world. It was first done under a violent form, classical Marxism, by killing tens of millions. Now it's being done mostly by cultural Marxism. There is continuity from Lenin's sex revolution, through Gramsci and the Frankfurt school, to the current-day gay-rights and gender ideology. Classical Marxism pretended to redesign society, through violent take-over of property. Now the revolution goes deeper; it pretends to redefine family, sex

[23] Press release on the 16th day, October 24, the Synod of Bishops.

> identity and human nature. This ideology calls itself progressive. But it is nothing else than the ancient serpent's offer, for man to take control, to replace God, to arrange salvation here, in this world.[24]

This lady from Romania may possibly suffer from a paranoia towards Communism. She would rather regard gay Catholics as members of the Marxist camp than brothers and sisters of her Mother Church.

In a news report in 2016, the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics was named directly:

> The *Catholic News Agency* earlier reported that LGBT activists had backed conferences and advocacy events to counter the narrative of the Catholic Church, especially during its synod on the family. These actions include the formation of a coalition called the Global Network of Rainbow Catholics and an advocacy campaign that targeted synod attendees in hopes of countering the influence of bishops from West Africa.[25]

So, who is not understanding whom? Have we not made ourselves clear enough? Our goal is to strive for a dialogue, instead of an answer of A or B. The answer is in the hand of God. We all know this clearly. And so, why do they so easily label us as opponents to the Catholic position. This is hurtful and a great smear on us, as we really love our Church.

The speech of Pope Francis on mercy reached deep down in our hearts. We can read in news reports about his speech at the close of the Synod.

> One of the pope's handpicked delegates in the Synod of Bishops said that the deliberations would benefit from inviting those who feel marginalised in the Church, such as divorced and remarried Catholics and gay and lesbian couples, to offer their experience to bishops firsthand.

---

[24] 'The world needs real freedom, liberation from sin, says Romanian doctor at the synod', *Voice of the Family*, October 17, 2015. https://voiceofthefamily.com/the-world-needs-real-freedom-liberation-from-sin-says-romanian-doctor-at-the-synod/

[25] A "gay lobby" at the Vatican? One cardinal says it's real, and Pope Francis is responding', *Catholic News Agency*. January 13, 2016. catholicnewsagency.com/news/33244/a-gay-lobby-at-the-vatican-one-cardinal-says-its-real-and-pope-francis-is-responding.

> "I did have those voices as part of my consultation," said Chicago Archbishop Blase Cupich. "But I do think that we could benefit from the actual voices of people who feel marginalised, rather than having them filtered through the voices of other representatives or the bishops."
>
> He said that it is important for Church leaders to listen to and engage with individual believers in order to understand their issues as they craft appropriate pastoral responses.
>
> "If we're really going to accompany people, we have to first of all engage them," Archbishop Cupich said. "In Chicago, I visit regularly people who feel marginalised, whether they're the elderly, or the divorced and remarried, gay and lesbian individuals, also couples."
>
> "I think we need to really get to know what their life is like if we're going to accompany them," he continued.[26]

I recorded the words of another bishop: it would be especially useful if cardinals could invite LGBTQI+ couples to come and share in the synod next year. Kindness, holiness and true love exist also in these families. This is a real dialogue and a progress in pastoral ministry.[27]

It is to be hoped that the words and deeds of these bishops become an influential voice and an action generally taken in the Church. We are willing to be companions to everyone in the Church. Yet, for this to be possible it is necessary to truly understand their lives. This includes everyone who thinks the way we do and those who are in disagreement. We can be unreserved and honest, because the Church has always emphasised that "every person is a mystery." In order to live out our brotherhood as sons of God, we are willing to share and explore this mystery; and in an intimacy with Jesus Christ, we safeguard and accompany until we obtain a common understanding and an answer.

---

[26] Michael O'Loughlin, 'Chicago prelate: Let gay and divorced Catholics take part,' *Crux*, October 16, 2015. https://cruxnow.com/church/2015/10/chicago-prelate-let-gay-and-divorced-catholics-take-part

[27] I used to keep records of related speeches posted on the internet. For a few of them the source is missing. This speech touched me so much, but I could not find the original source and cannot retrieve it on the internet. But I do wish to share these beautiful words.

III. DIFFERENT PATHS TOGAYTHER

Calling for Chinese Tongzhi (LGBTQI+) Believers' Tales

The Chinese are one of the most devout ethnic groups in the world. In the history of Chinese civilisation, religion has always been a significant feature. From primitive mythology, worship of the ancestors, to the establishment of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism; from the spread of Christianity, Islam to today's Bahá'í in China, monotheistic beliefs have taken root on the Chinese soil. Ancient religions such as Nestorianism, Manichaeism, Judaism and Zoroastrianism have been introduced and disappeared; today Chinese Déjiàohuì (the Church of Virtue) has spread overseas, not to mention the huge role that the Chinese have played in the development and dissemination of many beliefs. The forms of belief held by the Chinese are many and vary beyond compare.

The issue of LGBTQI+ identity seems to be revealing a joke between the gods and the LGBTQI+ community. What kind of tension, or grace, could the worship of gods and sages possibly have with a gay identity?

Among the gay friends I know, there are many Buddhists and Christians. Many of them first recognise their gay identity before accepting their religion. It may be more or less a desire for redemption. When the world does not allow this identity, it may be possible to obtain complete acceptance and the peace that follows in a religion.

I always advocate that religion is the most compassionate force that can elevate people's minds to an unprecedented level. When faith meets with the identity of a gay person, how do the gays live out their faith? Or, how is this belief linked to one's gay identity?

To stimulate discussion around these questions, I propose to publish a story collection of LGBTQI+ people with different religious beliefs, to collect his/her/their stories. The goal is to have 30 articles to be published in Chinese and English. Given the nature of the book, there is

no payment to those who submit their articles, as I hope you understand. When the book is published, one copy is given to each author.

Editors:
Ngeo Boon Lin
Eros Shaw

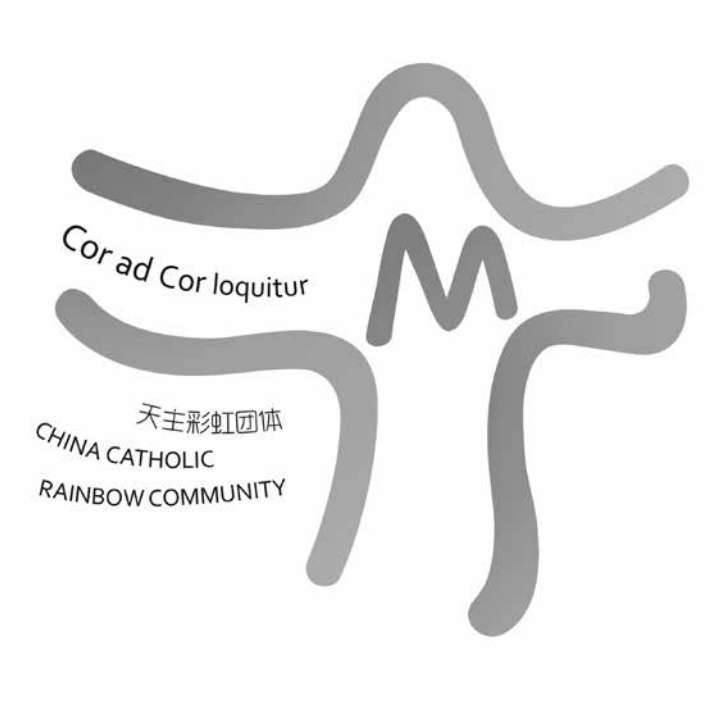
Content expectation:

1. Contributors are LGBTQI+ believers of any faith and ideology.
2. No word-limit and pseudonyms are accepted.
3. Each story will include self-analysis, and varying descriptions of spirituality, experience, sexual experience, emotion sentiment, family, society, etc., but all needs to be truthful.
4. The emphasis is to sort out and integrate the past experiences and to look to the future. Special emphasis is placed on the intimate connection with their gods and sages.

Contact:
422247611@qq.com
Please indicate in the subject line: 'Article for Different Paths Togayther."

Deadline:
No specific date

IV. BRIEF GUIDE TO LGBTQI+ CATHOLIC FELLOWSHIPS



China Catholic Rainbow Community, CCRC

The China Catholic Rainbow Community (CCRC) is an inter-regional mutual aid organisation for Chinese Roman Catholic LGBTQI+ people, with the same range and branches as China Rainbow Witness Fellowship and is a member of The Global Network of Rainbow Catholics. The online-based group was established July 27, 2013. It now has over 100 members who organise off-line activities regionally. Providing counselling and spiritual companionship for LGBTQI+ Catholic believers, we are dedicated to promoting the full integration of individuals' body and soul; Engaging in peaceful and rational dialogue with the Church, helping people to better integrate into faith and the Church, and offering auxiliary pastoral work for LGBTQI+ people. Patrons: Our lady of Seven Sorrows and St J H Newman.

Email: 422247611@qq.com.

Rainbow Witness Church of China

The Rainbow Witness Church of China (RWCC) is a LGBTQI+ Christian fellowship grounded in love and faith. The fellowship was established in 2009 in Beijing, with further groups established in Shanghai, Hangzhou, Wuhan and Changsha. It was originally designed to tell all people struggling with faith and identity: 'God be with you, you also have our companionship, you are not alone'. Its aim is to provide community support for LGBTQI+ Christian friends by listening, helping, striving to connect with each other and committing to support each other's faith in a spirit of mutual assistance and care; as well as striving to help LGBTQI+ nonbelievers to know God's love.

WeChat official account: rwcc-studio

Global Network of Rainbow Catholics, GNRC

The Global Network of Rainbow Catholics (GNRC) brings together organisations and individuals who work for pastoral care and justice for LGBTQI+ people and their families. We work for the affirmation, inclusion, dignity and equality of our rainbow community in the Roman Catholic Church and in society. The GNRC was founded in Rome in October 2015, and legally established in Munich-Dachau in December 2017 and is registered in Italy.

Website: www.rainbowcatholics.org

COMPASSION

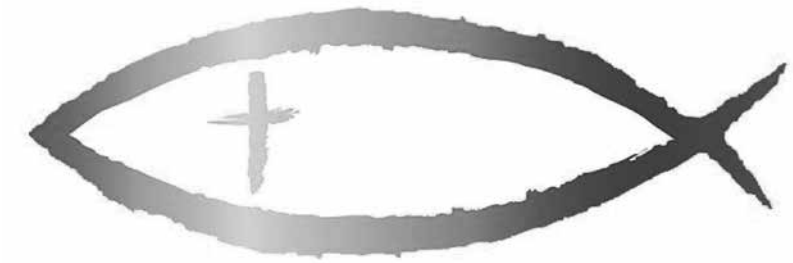
Several Hong Kong LGBTQI+ Catholics with different sexual orientations were unable to enjoy equal human dignity in the church and society and enjoy a mutually respectful, inclusive and friendly church life. Therefore, in June 2014, they set up Compassion, to let Hong Kong gay Catholics build a group life of friendship, acceptance, respect, and sharing. Through spiritual practice and learning, we aim to live a humanity of integration, heart, and spirit, and develop our own unique voice and help the church and society to respect the equal dignity of LGBTQI+ people.

Facebook: CompassionTQ

Asia-Pacific Rainbow Catholics Network

The Asia-Pacific Rainbow Catholics Network is made up of groups and groups in the Asia Pacific region that support homosexuality, bisexuality, transsexuality, bisexuality, queerness and their families within the Roman Catholic Church. Based on the life experience of members, the network provides rainbow Catholics from the Asia-Pacific region with dialogues that learn from each other, respect and tolerate, in order to maintain their dignity and celebrate the precious gifts they bring to the Church of God. "Become all things to all people" (1 Corinthians 9:22), it promises to work for a more just and compassionate church and social environment.

Facebook: RainbowCatholicsAP



Rainbow Catholics InterAgency for Ministry (Australia)

Rainbow Catholics InterAgency for Ministry (Australia) is a pastoral interagency supporting pastoral workers, pastoral leaders and pastoral organisers in the Australian Catholic church. Affirmed by their Christian faith and supported by Catholic Social Teaching, the primary purpose of the Rainbow Catholics InterAgency for Ministry is to build relationships, to promote dialogue, to pray and to educate the Catholic community in Australia. It works to advocate recognition of full equality and for justice with LGBTQI+ Catholics, their families and friends in the Catholic Church and in our larger community.

Through an interagency approach in which each Catholic organisation and group member is in an active ministry with LGBTQI+ Catholic Christians, they celebrate the gifts, the experiences, the wholeness and the achievements and the journeys of LGBTQI+ members of Catholic communities, affirming their faith, sexuality, gender identity and intersex status. We work towards ending homophobia, biphobia, transphobia, intersex erasure in our church and in our communities where discrimination, exclusion and prejudice occurs.

Facebook: RainbowCatholicsInterAgency